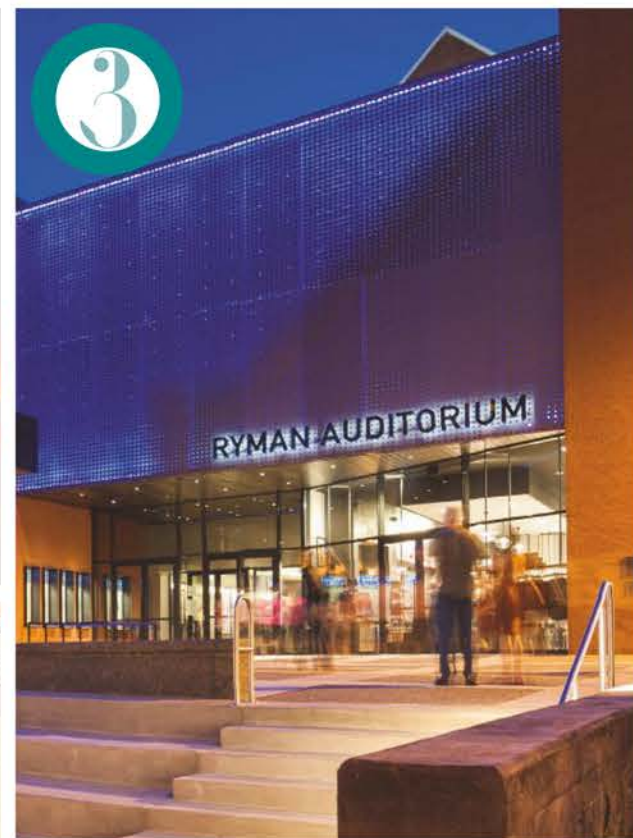


ASK THE experts

Nashville's music attractions are tuning up for the return of international visitors, finds **Natalie Marsh**



FIND OUT MORE

These attractions in Nashville feature on a number of itineraries, including escorted tours with Newmarket Holidays, Cosmos and Travelsphere. They're also recommended on many self-drives including routes from North America Travel Service and First Class Holidays. Tickets to shows at the Grand Ole Opry House can also be booked through several tour operators. For more information on holidays in Nashville and elsewhere in Tennessee, visit tnvacation.com

DESTINATIONS

NASHVILLE MUSIC | THE US

1 "There's nothing like a Grand Ole Opry show"

The Grand Ole Opry House is the home of the longest-running radio show in the US, also called the Grand Ole Opry. Guests can take backstage tours of the country music venue or attend one of its radio show recordings. Lee leads the venue's operations.



Kendall Lee,
director of operations
Grand Ole Opry House

There's nothing like a Grand Ole Opry show. When we shut down because of the pandemic, the Opry show did not shut down, it continued week to week. We started streaming the show every Saturday night. There was no charge to watch it and we had a tremendous reach to people all around the world, to let them experience a piece of the Grand Ole Opry.

Then we were gradually able to go back to a live audience with a restricted capacity. Currently, everyone has to wear a mask in the building, and our seating has been distanced and spread out.

We're going to have our 5,000th Grand Ole Opry broadcast in October. That's a huge milestone for us. We're planning a celebration that's going to last for several weeks. We'll do a plaza party in the huge area in front of the Opry House and we'll have some entertainment for that.

You can't say Nashville is Music City without the Grand Ole Opry. It's such a bucket-list item. If visitors come during the daytime, they can do the backstage tour, see the stage and tour the dressing rooms. But to experience a live radio show and have the performances going on in front of you, where else do you get that?

So many people come to Nashville to be discovered and live out their dream of being the next big hit in the music world. Wherever you go in the city, the talent level that you're going to get is amazing.

2 "We adapted to a virtual space"

The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum is in the centre of Nashville, with exhibits, galleries, performance spaces, an education centre and more. Henton focuses on the international, domestic and corporate travel markets for group and individual travellers.



Brad Henton, director of museum sales and guest experience
Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum

Visitors are more familiar with the big names: Dolly Parton, Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson. That might be what triggers the interest. But once you get into the museum, you see that trajectory from the late 1800s all the way to today.

We closed for around six months, which gave us the opportunity to invest resources into our online programming. Last year, we had just over seven million virtual visitors on our websites, programming and other activities. We took in-person programmes like our Songwriter Sessions and adapted them to a virtual space. We've also got two new virtual exhibits that are available free on our website.

The museum work never really stopped. We reopened in autumn, and in January we opened a physical exhibit called The Station Inn: Bluegrass Beacon. We also updated our American Currents exhibit, which focuses on the past year.

Songwriter Sessions are hugely popular. We do them every Tuesday on our website and they are followed up with a Q&A live on Instagram. Those are our most popular in-person programmes and that's been the same digitally, with the exception of a fundraiser in October, where we raised just north of \$1m. That goes back into the museum, supporting our mission and our education programmes.

3 "Nashville is Music City not Country Music City"

The Ryman Auditorium is the former home of the Grand Ole Opry and is a well-known venue for concerts and events, with exhibits offering guests an insight into the city's musical heritage. Levy oversees the daytime and night-time operations of the venue.



Gary Levy,
general manager
Ryman Auditorium

Next year, we will celebrate our 130th birthday. Since 1892, we've been holding performances and musical events here, including the Grand Ole Opry from 1943 to 1974. One of the newest exhibits for our daytime museum guests highlights the rock'n'roll experience. So many people identify us with country music – this is the building where Johnny Cash met June Carter Cash – but our history is so much deeper than that. Harry Houdini performed on stage here; Teddy Roosevelt spoke here. We have this wonderful, beautiful history of music, and we like to point it out because Nashville is called Music City – it's not called Country Music City.

We reopened last June because we needed to start getting music back out there. We had a very limited audience of ticketed guests. By the fourth show in, we got approval to have 125 people, which is about 5% capacity, and it was the most intimate concert you would ever experience. We hope by August to be back to full capacity, and if that is the case, there will hardly be an empty night here from September to the end of the year.

We're open daily for tours and, 98% of the time, you can get a picture on the stage.

In 2022, we will have a year-long celebration with wonderful acts returning. I can guarantee the 130th year will be the biggest and best yet at the Ryman. I feel we're going to celebrate our past and have this vision for the future that will carry us on.