The Mississippi Delta —
Shining Like a National Guitar

by Nancy Bestor

I grew up listening to Perry Como. And Nancy Sinatra. And Tony Bennett. As you might imagine these were not my musical choices (remember, I am only 48). They were my father’s. My Dad regularly spun his favorite tunes and sang throughout the house. So it would be safe to say that music has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. Thus a family vacation last spring to the home of country, soul, and rock and roll seemed a fitting adventure with my husband—an avid guitar player himself—and our daughters, both of whom love music, play instruments, and even host their own shows on Oregon State University’s campus radio station, KBVR Corvallis.

Our trip began in Jackson, Mississippi, and within the course of a week, we traveled to Memphis, Tupelo, and Nashville, hitting lots of musical hot spots and other intriguing Southern sites along the way. One week is hardly enough time to see it all, but as usual, we tried to fit in as much as we could. Here are a few highlights.

We began our musical history lessons at the Memphis Rock ‘n’ Soul Museum. Located at the corner of Beale Street and Highway 61 (how’s that for an auspicious address?) and created by the Smithsonian Institution, the Rock ‘n’ Soul Museum serves up a huge helping of legendary tales of musical integration.

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Johnny Wants A Pair of Skates, Suzy Wants a Sled

by Ember Hood

It’s beginning to look a lot like that time of the year, when we take special care to find a special something for that special someone. What follows are a few suggestions for the traveler, the gadget lover, the woman who loves soft and comfortable clothing, and more.

Osprey Ozone Uprights & Stuff Pack

We are excited to introduce Osprey’s Ozone Rolling Uprights ($200-250). Available in three key sizes, ranging from an 18” Rolling Carry-On, sure to meet even the strictest airline carry-on requirements—to the big (but not too big!) 28” Checkable Upright that’s perfect for hauling your gear around the world. And best of all, the three sizes are the lightest rolling bags we’ve ever offered, with even the largest weighing in at less than five pounds! For organization, each Ozone bag offers a top pocket for quick-grab items, a front organizational panel with mesh slip pockets, internal and external

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E.T. Phone Home

Using my Cell Phone Abroad

by Emily Bestor

When I finally made it to high school, I also finally got my first cell phone. Even at 14, I was just about the last of my friends to get one (thanks Mom and Dad). Since then my iPhone has been along on almost every trip I’ve taken.

I know people didn’t use to travel that way. When my parents were my age, they were already dating, and my Dad took a six-week backpacking trip across Europe. In those days, to communicate with his girlfriend, he had to write my Mom letters(!?) while he was abroad. I know what you’re thinking, “how grossly romantic,” right?

In this age of social media, with its hashtags, tweets and the possibility of...
and racial integration feeding each other and launching the revolutionary sounds of rock and roll and soul that reverberate throughout our culture to this day. With an amazing collection of instruments, clothing, photos and of course music from some of our country’s greatest musicians, this cozy museum will have you snapping your fingers and tapping your feet. Admission is $12, and we all snapped and tapped for the entirety of our two-hour visit. One exhibit covered the early days of Memphis radio, with fun sound bites from early shows on WDIA, the first black radio station started in 1947, and WHER, the first “All-Girl” station, started by Sam Phillips in 1955. We were entertained by actual broadcast announcements like “there’s a black cow loose on the streets of Memphis,” and “Mr. Jones has lost his false teeth. If you’ve seen them please call us at the station. He’d really like to chew food again.” The Memphis Rock ‘n’ Soul Museum is highly entertaining and a great introduction to the history of the Memphis music scene.

Museum is highly entertaining and a great introduction to the history of the Memphis music scene.

Our next lesson took place at Sun Studio. Most people know that Elvis got his start here, but so did Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, and Jerry Lee Lewis. Sam Phillips founded Sun in 1950. In 1953 Elvis paid $3.98 to record a song as a gift to his mother and a year later began the recording career that would set the world on fire. Although tiny, this still-working recording studio packs a huge punch, and to stand on the spot where Elvis recorded That’s All Right (Mama) and Johnny Cash laid down I Walk the Line, is well worth the $12 admission. A tour of Sun Studio is not to be missed.

Once you’ve visited Sun, the natural progression of historical Memphis music leads only to Graceland. And that’s where we found ourselves next. It’s hard to describe Graceland. Take an incredibly talented and famous young man, throw lots of money at him, mix it with the dated (and often questionable) tastes and styles of the 1960s and ’70s, and you might begin to imagine what Graceland is like. The home and grounds, as well as the furniture and memorabilia, have been fantastically preserved to the point where you think you might just see Elvis saunter around the corner crooning Are You Lonesome Tonight.

Graceland is a business, and I’m guessing an immensely profitable one at that. “Platinum Tour” tickets, which include a tour of the mansion, a visit to Elvis’ airplanes—the Hound Dog II and the Lisa Marie—a tour of Elvis’ 20+ cars in the car museum, and a visit to the Archives Studio, were ours to be had, all for the low, low price of $45 each for adults, and $40.50 each for students. The vibe is cheesy and Disney-esque, but with employees who are nowhere near as friendly as Disney employees. And the attention to detail is nowhere near Disney standards either. The paint is peeling, the lawns are a bit weedy, and just about every indoor space has a musty aroma. The tour comes with a “state of the art” interactive iPad program, narrated by actor John Stamos (don’t worry, we thought the John Stamos as narrator was weird too). It’s wacky, it’s kooky, and it’s surreal. But like Paul Simon, for reasons I cannot explain, there’s some part of me that wants to see Graceland. And you should too.

Our musical history lessons didn’t end at Graceland. We also took a fantastic tour of the Gibson Guitar Factory, where we watched their guitar building artisans at work, and learned all about the process of how these electric beauties are crafted. Gibson has been making guitars for more than 100 years, and is the choice of many a famous musician, including Les Paul, B.B. King and Chet Atkins, to name just a few. Thanks to TripAdvisor reviews we read prior to our visit, we timed our one-hour tour for when we knew employees would be in action (not on a weekend or during lunch hour). The factory is dusty, and it’s a little hard to hear your guide, but from bare blocks of wood all the way to the dazzling finished product, you’re right in the middle of guitar making magic.

Our final Memphis musical history stop was at yet another fabulous, fun and moving shrine to American music, the Stax Museum of American Soul. So many great soul musicians recorded with Stax, and of course, the museum features...
E.T. Phone Home—Using My Cell Phone...

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Youtube fame, people brag about their trips on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, to name a few. But I am not that type of traveler. Therefore, for my own five-week solo trip across Europe this summer, I knew I wouldn’t need much of a phone plan. Just enough to send texts to my family, be able to make a phone call in an emergency, or use a little bit of data for Google Maps if I ever got lost. I tried hard to stay away from Facebook, because I wanted to focus on my trip and the experiences I was having, instead of what my friends were doing back home in the US of A.

For $30 a month I chose AT&T’s Passport package. It’s the cheapest plan available, and with it I had unlimited data and 125 MB of data Any phone calls I needed to make would cost $1/minute. (AT&T’s more costly packages offer increased data amounts and decreased per minute phone call rates.)

Before leaving on my European adventure, I booked a few key hostels. I was traveling in August, at the height of the tourist season, and I knew that hostels would fill up fast. I also wanted to have a little peace of mind; I was quite nervous before leaving! But, for the cities that I didn’t have advance bookings, my phone came in very handy. I was able to use it to check out hostel reviews, rates and availability for whichever city I fancied to travel to next. So any time I wanted, I could research and book the next few nights of my vacation with my phone, all while sitting in a youth hostel lobby, using free wireless internet.

I also regularly used the Eurail App. This App is offline, meaning once I downloaded it onto my phone, I didn’t need data or wifi to access its information. It was incredibly helpful when looking at train schedules and figuring out how long it would take me to get from city to city. The app has a ton of information like how many stops the train would make, if there was food or a bathroom, if it had first class seats, and if seats had to be reserved in advance. Thankfully, I never had to make an emergency phone call, but I did rely on Google Maps once or twice. When I first arrived at the Berlin Hauptbahnhof, it was bigger than I ever expected it to be. I had directions on how to get to my hostel, but I couldn’t for the life of me figure out where to find the correct bus stop. I started to panic as I began to circle the ginormous train station for a second time, but then remembered it was 2015 and I had a cell phone. After a few short minutes on Google Maps, I found the correct bus stop and was soon aboard the correct bus.

There was always free Wifi at the hostels and often in the museums as well. In Amsterdam, Rick Steves had warned me that there would be a long line for the Van Gogh museum. But Rick also advised me that tickets were available online. The afternoon I arrived, I sat on the grass right outside the museum and used their Wifi to buy my ticket. It was a timed entry ticket, so instead of standing in line, I enjoyed the sun, had a snack, and read my book until I could go in. I waltzed right past the line, showing the ticket that was emailed to my cell phone a mere 40 minutes prior.

Having a working cell phone was also a great way to keep in touch with all of my brand new friends. I met travelers from all over the world in the hostels. In reality, they were all perfect strangers. And it’s a funny thing really, because in the U.S., I would never in a million years decide to spend an entire day with someone I just met, but one of the best parts of my trip was meeting those people. Currently, I am completely wrapped up in school and work, but now and then a photo of one of them pops up on my Facebook News Feed and I am reminded of another chapter in the story of my trip. It’s possible I will never see any of them again, but that’s almost part of the fun.

Depending on your phone plan, the type of traveler you are, and the trip you are taking, you’ll have lots of options for overseas use plans. There are way too many to list. But here are the basics. You can do what I did and simply add the appropriate international service to your existing phone plan. Or you can get a European SIM card. To do this, you need either to unlock your phone or buy a European phone. Once you have the correct phone, SIM cards are sold throughout Europe at mobile-phone stores, some newsstands, and even at some vending machines. You’ll need to make sure it covers all countries in which you’ll be traveling. You’ll also need to ensure it meets your needs for texting and data. Typically, a sales clerk can install it and make sure it’s working properly before you go out on your adventure. No matter what you choose, be sure to monitor your data usage. It is easy to mistakenly exceed your data allotment and that can cost you lots of money.

Having a cell phone while traveling definitely has its perks, but it also can also have its drawbacks. My favorite postcard shows a photograph of about a dozen cell phones simultaneously taking a photo of the Mona Lisa in the Louvre in Paris. Let this be a word of caution. Sometimes trying to take the perfect photograph detracts from the real thing.

—Emily Bestor is a junior at Oregon State University, double majoring in business management and business information systems. Having traveled since the age of three, Emily’s mother thinks Emily might just run the world one day.
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includes a couple of luxury touches in its small package—air-mesh shoulder straps for extra comfort, for one, as well as a mesh side pocket that’s perfect for water bottles, and a top zippered stash pocket for a bit of organization.

Pack-It Sets
Eagle Creek’s Pack It organizers have been an organized traveler’s best friend for years. These lightweight and compact packing cubes, sacks, and folders have helped keep suitcases tidy all over the world. And while they organize, they also compress clothing and give you more room to pack. To help you get started, everyone knows who your team is with the right Sport Luggage Tag.

BambooDreams Nightwear
Yala’s BambooDreams clothing collection has long been a traveler’s favorite. Yala’s soft, elegant, and lightweight fabric is extremely comfortable and perfect for all sorts of climates. And now you can slumber in your own BambooDreams with our new Bamboo Nightwear. The Delia Pajama set ($99.95) offers a sleeveless top with a graceful drape and a pair of ohh-so-stretchy pants. The Penelope Nightshirt ($59.95) is an above-the-knee gown with cap sleeves.

We also love Osprey’s Ultralight Stuff Pack ($35). When you’re not using the pack, it tucks neatly into its own tiny stuff pouch. But unlike other packable backpacks, the Ultralight Stuff Pack

Eagle Creek offers a variety of packing sets like the Pack It Starter Set ($44), which includes a Pack It Folder, perfect for keeping your nicer clothing neat and wrinkle-free. It also includes both a Pack it Cube and Pack it Half Cube, good for rolled-up t-shirts, pants, pajamas and more. If you want a set that’s all Pack It Cubes or Stuff Sacks, Eagle Creek offers those too. No matter which route you take, Pack It Organizers keep your suitcase neat and organized and your clothing protected.

Sport Luggage Tags
Itching to show your support for your favorite team? Fun and flashy Sport Luggage Tags ($6.95) are a great way to do it! And they help you identify your luggage at the same time. Are you a Duck or a Beaver? Does your heart bleed the Silver and Black of the Oakland Raiders (cough, cough, Bob)? Or does your allegiance lie with the Lakers and Dodgers? No matter what, it’s all in good fun, and we’ve got lots of teams to choose from. So make sure

If you’d prefer something cooler, the Delia Nightgown (pictured above at $64.95) offers the same above-the-knee length in a sleeveless cut. All three of these sleepwear options pair nicely with the Nina Belted

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Robe ($89.95), a comfortable bamboo robe with 3/4 sleeves and an above-the-knee length. Soft, comfortable, and easy-to-care-for, Bamboo Dreams Nightwear is a great addition to both your travel and everyday wardrobes.

3-1-1 Carry-on Liquid Bag
Our durable and reusable TPU (Thermoplastic polyurethane) 3-1-1 One-Quart Toiletry Pouch ($6.95) helps you easily comply with the TSA's 3-1-1 rule for carry-on liquids: three-ounce bottles in a one-quart clear plastic bag, one of which is allowed in your carry-on. Its rugged construction helps reduce the waste created by flimsy, single-use zip-loc bags and, along with its water-resistant zipper, keeps the rest of your luggage protected by containing leaks. Pack your shampoos, soaps and lotions with confidence and speed through airport security with ease.

Aeros Neck Pillow
Comfort can be hard to come by on a long train ride or a crowded flight. But the amazingly compact Aeros Traveler Neck Pillow ($34.95) is up to the job. The Aeros deflates to easily fit into its included storage pouch that's about the size of a deck of cards. Packed away, it conveniently tucks into your pocket or purse until you need it, and then quickly inflates to a full-sized and very comfortable neck pillow. Its ergonomic shape cradles your head and neck while its soft exterior feels great against your skin, letting you rest easily in even the most cramped spaces.

Conair Hair Dryer
Conair's Compact Folding Hair Dryer ($24.99) offers you mighty drying power in the palm of your hand. A powerful 1200 watts will dry your hair quickly while the folding design lets you stow it easily in your toiletry kit. And it's dual voltage, so it works with both 110-volt domestic and 220-volt international electrical systems, allowing you to keep your hair styled and looking good wherever you wander. This is the smallest dual voltage hair dryer we have ever seen. If suitcase space and looking good are a priority, this hair dryer is just the ticket.

Celestron Binoculars
Want to zoom in on all the sights of your next adventure? Celestron’s Up-Close Binoculars ($24.95) are pocket-sized but powerful. Their 8x magnification is perfect for sightseeing, a sharp image is guaranteed with a diopter adjustment for precise focusing, and their protective rubber coating ensures a secure grip. The Celestron Up-Close Binoculars also feature a folding center bridge for compact storage in their included nylon carrying case. Toss a pair in your travel bag for your next trip, and be sure to get the best view in the house.

Jewelry Roll
If you need a simple, handy and snazzy way to organize jewelry and small items on your next vacation, the Jewelry Roll ($15) is a great solution. With six convenient pockets, it keeps necklaces, earrings, bracelets, hair accessories, etc. neat and organized. And, it rolls up small to tuck easily into any pocket or corner of your bag and help you travel the world in style.

"It took me four days to hitchhike from Saginaw. I've come to look for America." — Simon & Garfunkel
Travel Smarter with A Few Travel Secrets

I’ve come to the realization—admittedly rather late in life—that I don’t know everything. About anything. Just when I think I’ve got it all figured out, someone throws me a curveball. Thus I thought I’d share some of the more recent “travel hacks” I’ve learned, from friends, from the Internet, and from experience, that are making my own travels a little less expensive, a little easier, and yes, a little more fun too.

• Strange as this one seems to me, round trips airline tickets are sometimes more expensive than two one-way tickets to and from the same destination. Now, every time I am researching an airfare, I put one-way dates into the various cheap ticket website search fields. I’ve saved anywhere from $10 to $50 on airfare. I don’t understand it, but I don’t need to understand it. I’m just happy to save a few bucks (aren’t we all?).

• “Hidden city” ticketing. Who knew? Book a flight past your destination, with your target destination as a stop on the route, and save more than if on the direct route. In other words, you want to fly to Salt Lake City, but it’s actually cheaper to buy a ticket to Phoenix with a stop in Salt Lake City. Buy the ticket to Phoenix, carry on your bag, and get off the plane in Salt Lake City. The website skiplagged.com will help you find these flights.

• If you’re heading to Europe, check out the non-US carriers that are not on Expedia, Kayak, Orbitz, etc. Emily booked a non-stop ticket from Portland to Frankfurt on Condor for significantly cheaper than any US airline was offering. Icelandair is another carrier who often has excellent prices, and you can sometimes stop in Iceland for a several day layover at no extra charge too!

• I have started downloading my airline’s app onto my phone or iPad before I travel. It’s an easy way to access my itinerary and boarding pass, and on some airlines, I even get free in-flight entertainment. When my travels are over, I delete the app to save room on my phone or iPad.

• I’ve said it before, but it bears repeating here. TSA Pre-Check and Global Entry are worth the application hassle and money if you travel more than once a year. If nothing else, you can keep your shoes on in the security line, and avoid potential foot fungus. Ick.

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the music and stories of these greats, including Otis Redding, Booker T. and the MGs, Rufus Thomas, Isaac Hayes, Sam & Dave, the Staple Singers, and many more. There’s even an Express Yourself dance floor, where you can boogie along with vintage episodes of Soul Train. Tickets are $13 each—another not-to-be-missed Memphis music site.

We left Memphis with a great soundtrack playing in our heads, and headed for Nashville and the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. Now I’m not a huge country music fan, particularly modern day country, but I’ll be jiggered if this wasn’t my favorite museum of the bunch. It’s huge, and spread out over several floors is more information about country music from its early years to the present than my brain could comprehend on our visit. A fantastic exhibit on the 1969 collaborations of Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash was one of the highlights for me. As was Sing Me Back Home, the history of folk and country music from its roots in the 19th century to today. Early video of Hank Williams, Merle Travis, Lefty Frizzell, and June Carter would, in my humble opinion, put many MTV music videos to shame. We bought a family pass for $100, because that was cheaper than buying individual tickets, and I only wish I lived closer to take advantage of my year-long membership. The museum even houses an 800-seat concert theater.

We fittingly ended our musical odyssey by attending a live show by Caitlin Rose at the Mercy Lounge. Described as alternative country, Rose is a twenty-year country, much as the younger set. Something who sings about love, heartache, good times and bad. Bob and I were on the old side for the crowd, but we did our best to blend in with the country hipsters, and enjoyed the show just as much as the younger set. And with that, our musical history tour came to its conclusion. I could easily have spent many more days on the road in the South, but alas, work and school were calling us home. Fortunately though It’s (not) Now or Never, and Tomorrow (won’t) Be Too Late, as we’ll definitely head back South again someday. And There’ll Be Peace in the Valley (for me).

—Nancy and Bob Bestor’s “song” is Suspicious Minds by Elvis himself. It’s a long story, but just know that it worked out in the end.

For more stories about our Southern Musical Odyssey, subscribe to our monthly e-newsletter via service@travelessentials.com

“T’ve been everywhere, man. I’ve been everywhere, man. Crossed the deserts bare, man. I’ve breathed the mountain air, man. Travel I’ve had my share, man. I’ve been everywhere.” —JOHNNY CASH
We Will Be Oh So Gay—Eat Fried Chicken Every Day

by Nancy Bestor

While it’s true that Memphis has a ton of musical history to experience, that’s not all it has going for it. A stately old hotel, duck parades, The National Civil Rights Museum, and the best fried chicken I have ever tasted are a few more reasons that Memphis should be on everyone’s travel to-do list.

We arrived in the Blues City late one evening from Jackson, Mississippi, guiding our rental car through its sleepy downtown to our hotel, The Peabody. Originally opened in 1869, and at its present location since 1925, the Peabody is one of the grandest hotels I’ve ever visited. Its lobby is stunning, its rooms (although small) are stately, its downtown location perfect, and I love the ducks! Five North American mallards reside in style in the Royal Duck Penthouse on the hotel’s roof, and make twice-daily treks, via elevator, to and from the hotel lobby fountain. The marching mallards are led by a Duckmaster, and the procession is a site to behold. Tourists begin filling the lobby as much as an hour in advance of the morning and afternoon parades and while I thought it might be silly, in reality, it is pretty gosh darn adorable. We had drinks and dessert in the lobby one evening, while listening to a jazz pianist tickle old show tunes and other classics out of a grand piano. I couldn’t help but imagine how the crowds must have changed over the years. While the Peabody’s guests of today wandered and relaxed in jeans, shorts and t-shirts, I’m certain folks in the olden days were dressed to the hilt.

The National Civil Rights Museum, in the Lorraine Motel, where Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in 1968, is one of the best and most moving museums I have ever visited. Many exhibits gave me chills, especially the actual Greensboro, North Carolina lunch counter where four men staged a non-violent sit-in in 1960. It was accompanied by footage from the event and the ensuing conflicts. Another exhibit that I couldn’t stop thinking about was entitled “We Are Prepared to Die—The Freedom Rides of 1961”, that honors the 13 civil rights activists (seven African-American and six white) who rode in protest of segregation in bus terminals in a Greyhound bus that was ultimately bombed. Of course seeing the hotel room (#306) where Reverend King spent his last hours, and looking at the balcony where he was shot were equally moving. The museum also owns the Legacy Building, across the street from the Lorraine Motel, where, from a second floor boarding house bathroom window, James Earl Ray fired his infamous shot. The building includes a fascinating timeline of the ensuing investigation and man-hunt, and outlines the case against Ray. There was so much to see at the Civil Rights Museum, and so much information to take in, that I could easily have spent several more hours. But the truth is, my brain can only take in a certain amount, particularly when it comes to so much sorrow and injustice. Admission to the Museum is $15 for adults, and $14 for students. We were there on a Sunday, and it was very crowded. I’d recommend a weekday visit.

It’s hard to transition from talking about civil rights to fried chicken, but here goes. I am a huge fan of fried chicken. Maybe it goes back to my high school days. When my mom got her first job (as a gift wrapper at Montgomery Ward) she sometimes worked during dinner. On the
nights my father was also working the swing shift at his factory job, I was given enough money to walk to Kentucky Fried Chicken and buy myself dinner. I’ll be honest, I haven’t eaten at KFC in at least 25 years, but I still salivate when I think about KFC coleslaw and mashed potatoes. Whatever the reason, I love fried chicken. I order it whenever I see it on a reputable menu. So of course I did my advance research in a quest to find the finest fried chicken Memphis has to offer. And find it, I did! Gus’s World Famous Fried Chicken was indeed the best fried chicken I’ve had in a long time. The only rival I can think of was at Fiorella’s Cafe in New Orleans (not surprisingly another no-frills and no bull Southern eatery). Gus’s serves fried chicken, fried chicken, and fried chicken. On the side they serve baked beans, potato salad and fried dill pickles (incredibly delicious too), but if you’re coming to Gus’s, it’s all about the chicken. Meals are served on paper plates, the wait staff is delightful, and it’s cheap too, with three pieces of dark meat and two sides priced at just $5.99. Their recipe is a secret, thank God. Because if I could make this at home, I would eat it three times a week and be 50+ pounds heavier. If you like fried chicken, do yourself a favor and make your way to Gus’s in Memphis. And bring me back a few pieces while you’re at it.

As much as I like fried chicken, Bob likes barbecue, so after eating at Gus’s on two separate occasions, I acquiesced and agreed to a Memphis barbecue feast. There were so many places to choose from, and we only had so many meals available (especially after eating at Gus’s twice). The joint of choice was Elwood’s Shack. The online Yelp reviews were excellent, and besides, how can you go wrong with a name like that? Located in an out-of-the-way spot at the edge of a Lowe’s parking lot, Elwood’s is also favored by local law enforcement officials, as evidenced by the clientele when we arrived. Let’s get real here—this is always a good sign. And the cops were not wrong, Elwood’s is delicious. One of the best things we ordered were fish tacos—at a barbecue joint you say?—and yes, they were great too! But it was the brisket and the Memphis style ribs that we thoroughly enjoyed. And I do mean thoroughly. And utterly. And completely.

—Nancy Bestor, co-owner of Travel Essentials, wishes everyone had equal rights, and enough fried chicken to never go hungry.