

CLARKSDALE-MISSISSIPPI

Clarksdale is a city in Coahoma County, Mississippi, United States, and seat of the county. The western boundary of the county is formed by the Mississippi River. Located in the Mississippi Delta region, Clarksdale is an agricultural and trading centre. It has been home to many blues musicians.

This is a fabulous town to listen to live blues music.

Here you go, a listing of things 'Clarksdale'.

Also check out www.americanamusictriangle.com

Clarksdale's Juke Joint Festival is in April every year (14 April 2018): most people arrive on the Thursday and leave on Monday (4 nights). The festival is all day and night: 'small town' events in the several streets (about 100 tents etc and buskers, art, FOOD, etc) and at night a \$25 wrist band gets you into any and all venues and the shuttle bus – but everything is within walking distance (except the Shack Up Inn) – all located in the downtown (95%) and also out at Shack Up Inn (5km which is an incredible place to stay (see below). We stay at the Uptown Motor Inn, smack dab in the centre of downtown – walk everywhere. Inexpensive and authentic 1960s style. On the Friday night at The Bank they hold the "Welcome Home Aussie" party (free). Everyone is OK to turn up, Aussie or not. The festival web site is www.jukejointfestival.com

Before the JJF, we usually have a Welcome to **Memphis** night at Ernestine & Hazel's (on South Main Street) on the Wednesday and organised by our Memphian friends; it's voted one of the top "dives" in USA. Used to be a chemist downstairs and brothel upstairs. Mick Jagger wrote "Honky Tonk Women" about the venue. Now a great place for soul burgers or for a more refined meal out the back (no penicillin required) at the Five Spot. Check it all out at www.ernestineandhazelsjukejoint.com

Side trips noted below, including **Oxford** (60 mins from Clarksdale) beautiful university town known as "Ole Miss"; literature, etc), **Helena Arkansas** 45 minutes from Clarksdale (former Mississippi River steamship town, now semi-derelict and truly worth a visit – interesting information centre, Civil War, etc); **Sumner** 20 minutes south from Clarksdale (Emmett Till Memorial Centre), **Greenwood** 60 minutes south from Clarksdale (Lusco's restaurant from the 1920s, complete with curtained-off sections so no-one would know yer drinkin' alcohol; stay at the Alluvian – well worth it), etc. **Memphis**, of course, is worth 2 full days – see below.

For those also seeking out other music places of interest (in addition to Clarksdale and Memphis), this locale is a comfortable drive to **Nashville** (via **Leipers Fork and Franklin** about 40 minutes drive south of Nashville) and about 6hrs drive south to **New Orleans**. Other places to the east include the likes of **Selma, Savannah and Charleston**, while to the south-west we have **Austin** and other Texas towns. SO: a vacation in Clarksdale can open you up to lotts road trips following the JJF festival. Again, check out www.americanamusictriangle.com. **Chicago** is about a 9-hr drive to the north.

Clarksdale

(75 minutes' drive south of Memphis on Highway 61).

Accommodation

Economy: good and clean and central and cheap – **Uptown Motor Inn** on East Second Street ('Mary' from India runs it; of course). About \$65/double. Walking distance to everything. OR, **Riverside Hotel**, Sunflower Avenue, where Bessie Smith died after an auto accident (it was an African-American hospital then), and since 1944 a hotel for Blues musicians – they ALL stayed here at some time or other; the place is just like it was in those days. Historic, in a word! Probably about \$55/night??

Upmarket: all in downtown – **The Clark House** (BnB, original ante bellum home of the town's founder – innkeeper is Billy Howell); **The Lofts at the Five and Dime** (Bubba O'Keefe – 'Mr Clarksdale') in exact centre of downtown; **Ground Zero Blues Club** (lofts upstairs); **The Squeeze Box** (1 room guesthouse), **Hooker Hotel** (2 rooms) and **Delta Digs** (1 room) all managed by John Magnusson.

Different: **Shack Up Inn** (and Shacksdale, opposite), about 5km from downtown on original Highway 49. Original sharecropper shacks with power and water added. Absolutely unique. Just as the owners are (Guy and Billy). Now ranked among the top in the world for unique visitor accommodation on Trip Advisor. A MUST SEE place, even if you're not staying there. It has bar/food/venue (The Chapel).

Places

Music: Most nights, especially at weekends – **Red's Lounge** (authentic juke joint – must go!); **Ground Zero Blues Club** (Morgan Freeman is co-owner with Bill Luckett, local lawyer); **Bluesberry Café**; Stan Street's **Hambone Gallery** (jam session every Tuesday and Thursday night); **The Chapel at Shack Up Inn** (bar/venue/eats, especially on weekends); and next door at **Hopson's Commissary** (James Butler), plus some others.

Eats: **Yazoo Pass** (breakfast/lunch – Merri); **Abe's BBQ** (must go for pulled pork at lunch – Pat owner; Lucille will wait your table); **Ramon's** (2km from downtown – for fried food extraordinaire); **Bluesberry** (food and blues); **Levon's** (Sydneysiders, Johnny and Naomi); **Stone Pony** for pizza/pasta; **Rust** at Shack Up Inn (basic bar food); Anywhere out on **State Street** (Highway 61) for fast food - if you must. **Our Grandma's Pancakes and Blues Bar** in Delta Avenue.

Galleries and shops: **Cat Head Delta Music and Folk Art** (must-see; meet Roger); **Hambone Gallery** (meet Stan); Other gift etc shops in Delta Avenue.

Museum: **Delta Blues Museum** (must-see); **Rock 'n Blues Heritage Museum** (must-see!; Theo's the owner)

Literature: **Tennessee Williams** lived here as a boy. Many of his plays have Clarksdale characters. **Annual TW Festival** in October on front porches in historic area.

Qawpaw Canoe Co: **John Ruskey** takes canoe trips on the Mighty Mississippi for about \$100/half day – you can paddle the canoe too! Experience of a lifetime.

Other Towns in Area

Helena, Arkansas: about 45 minutes' drive from Clarksdale – Mississippi River boar town. Rather dishevelled, but worth a look at a (now) very poor, former riverboat city. Interesting Main Street, with shops and Museum. Civil War site. Stop at Friars Point museum on the way. Helena appears to be on the re-bound, economically.

Indianola: visit the BB King Museum – more than just BB King – much Civil Rights / Delta history.

Cleveland: visit the new Grammy Museum – only one outside of LA. “the most technologically-advanced music-themed museum in the South”. About 45 minutes south of Clarksdale.

Po' Monkey's: Juke Joint at Merigold: 20 miles south-west of Clarksdale (*en route* to Cleveland) – authentic rural juke joint - one of the last. Now closed but worth stopping by en route to/from Cleveland.

Oxford: University town about 60 minutes' drive east of Clarksdale. James Meredith was first African American admitted to Ole Miss University in 1960s, with National Guard support. Can drive/walk around campus. Cute town, quite different from those in the Delta. William Faulkner's home near to downtown (about 1 mile south) is a must-see.

Sumner: 20 minutes south on highway 49 – this is where the Emmett Till case was heard in local courthouse c1954 – Emmett (a 14-yr old African American kid from Chicago visiting family) was murdered for allegedly wolf-whistling a White woman and beaten/killed by her husband and the husband's half-brother. His murderers got off. The Sumner Court House (the courtroom now restored to how it was in the 1950s court case) and the Emmett Till Interpretative Centre are very worthwhile places to visit as part of the Civil Rights movement.

Greenwood: 55 minutes south of Clarksdale. Stay at the Alluvian Hotel for some pampering. Go to Lusco's, original restaurant from Prohibition Era 1920s, with individual dining 'rooms' where you sit at your table, and no-one knows you're drinking alcohol, or with whom you're dining.

Memphis, TN

Economy accommodation: **Vista Motel** on Union Avenue. About \$65/double + tax; almost next door to Peabody Hotel (200m) and Beale Street (350m).

Upmarket accommodation: **Talbot Heirs** self-contained suites on Second Street – very nice, and opposite The Peabody Hotel's carpark in Second Street! From \$150+tax for a double 'loft'. Peabody Hotel: from about \$250+tax a room. At least go there for a martini and to see the ducks.

Places: **Sun Studio** (where Rock n Roll began); **Graceland**; **Stax Records**; **National Civil Rights Museum** (former Lorraine Motel) – ‘must see’; **Beale Street** (shops, bars, etc); **Peabody Hotel** (cocktails, ducks, and Elvis’ shop at Lansky’s); a walk along **South Main Street** – arty/coffee/etc precinct, and use Melbourne’s W-Class trams. **Ernestine & Hazel’s** dive bar; **Blues Society HQ**.

Food: soul burger at **Ernestine & Hazel’s**, South Main Street (must go!) or a \$20 steak at **Top Spot** at rear (still there??) – all used to be drug store on ground floor and brothel upstairs. Not much has changed. **Arcade Diner** also on South Main Street, diagonally opposite E&H’s (Elvis ate here); **Gus’** for Fried Chicken on Front Street. **Itta Bena** restaurant/bar above BB King’s venue (named after BB’s birthplace) in Beale Street.

Well, there’s a start.

All these places can be googled.