

SNAPSHOT: **BRYAN-COLLEGE STATION, TEXAS**

Back to School

By Emily Storrow

School pride runs deep in **College Station**. The home of Texas A&M, it's affectionately referred to as Aggieland, a fitting nickname for a town where alums (Aggies, if you want to sound local) have made a habit of sticking around and opening businesses. The same can be said for the neighboring town of **Bryan**. The oldest public school in Texas, plans for A&M pre-date its statehood. History runs deep—it has bragging rights as the place where country music legends Lyle Lovett and Robert Earl Keen first crossed paths as students. With one of the biggest undergraduate populations in the country at 64,882, there's no question that the school has a larger-than-life presence in town. And that means there's plenty to take in on any visit, including pastoral corners of campus, the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, and this time of year, that unmistakable, palpable energy that accompanies college football season in the South.

EAT + DRINK

Start your morning with a Texas specialty at **Kolache Rolf's**. We're talking about pastries of yeasty dough filled with fruit and/or cheese that were introduced to the Lone Star State by Czech immigrants in the late 1800s. Or, stop into **MESS Waffles, Etc.** It's one of many eateries started by enterprising Aggies who didn't want to leave town after graduating. Formerly a food truck, the brick-and-mortar opened last year with offerings that look beyond its namesake. Another of those alum-run joints is **Grub Burger Bar**. Here, the burgers come well dressed and the menu is imbued with Texas touches, like Dr Pepper barbecue sauce and Shiner Bock-battered onion rings. Finish on a sweet note with one of Grub's signature boozy—and dairy free—shakes. A local favorite for a quick bite, **Layne's Chicken Fingers** has a handful of locations in Texas, but

the original opened in College Station back in 1994 (by—you guessed it—an Aggie). The menu is minimalist; go the drive-thru route for fried chicken, texas toast, and your choice of sauces for dipping. Have you ever eaten lunch in a laundromat? Just steps from the Texas A&M campus, **Harvey Washbangers** is the laundrobar brainchild of Culinary Institute of America-trained chef Michael Lair. Yes, it really is a destination for coeds toting laundry baskets, but it's also a hangout for residents craving Texas craft beer and



A DINNER AT RONIN FARM



A&M'S AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES BUILDING

There's plenty to take in, from pastoral corners of campus to the unmistakable, palpable energy of college football season in the South.

scratch-made food. The menu is just zany enough to keep things interesting (see: "porkaholic" cheese fries). Over in Bryan, **Jesse's Taqueria & Bakery** is a temple to tacos, filling tortillas with all the meats (barbacoa, picadillo, pork asado, and then some). Plus, four words: all-day breakfast tacos. Dinner deserves a reservation at Bryan's **Ronin**, a new restaurant from Brian and Amanda Light. Having first fed the community

through nine-course tasting dinners on their nearby farm, the couple channels those vibes at the downtown concept, serving their harvest around two hand-built communal tables in the main dining room. Back in College Station, you could also head to **Poppy**, inside the George hotel. Lest you miss the wood-burning hearth positioned at its center, the restaurant prides itself on live-fire cooking. Get a taste with some grilled focaccia, served with rabbit rillettes and pickled veggies, then the oak-grilled short rib draped in smoked chile glaze and charred corn butter. After dinner, wander

PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: RYAN PRICE; RYAN PRICE; COURTESY OF 12TH MAN FOUNDATION; COURTESY OF MESSINA WINERY; COURTESY OF THE GEORGE; COURTESY OF CANTEEN



KYLE FIELD

over to **1791 Whiskey Bar** off the lobby for a nightcap. With six distinctive iterations on the menu, you could say it specializes in old fashioned. Go for the rye-based Persian Merchant; its trio of bitters (saffron, vanilla, and cardamom) play well with the spicy spirit. Looking to wet your whistle in a more casual venue? No trip is complete without a few cold ones at Northgate's **Dixie Chicken**, a bona fide College Station institution that draws a lively crowd on game days.

DO

Experiencing a game at **Kyle Field** is a college football bucket list experience. Following a \$484 million renovation in 2014, the

stadium now seats a staggering 102,733 in its vertiginous stands. It's known as the Home of the 12th Man—a motto that harkens to 1922 when student E. King Gill suited up and joined the team in a tough match. Nearly a century later, students still take the legacy so seriously they're on their feet for all home games, symbolically ready to answer the call. If one isn't on your agenda, you can still see the stadium during a behind-the-scenes tour, offered Wednesday through Friday. Also in order: a stroll around the **Texas A&M campus** to take in its sweeping oak-lined lawns and neoclassical architecture—specifically ten ornate buildings that were built at the height of the Great Depression (with the help of \$3 million in West Texas oil money). Channel your inner cowboy with a trip to **Catalena Hatters** in Bryan, a family-run operation that's been crafting custom headgear for three generations. Then, get a taste of Texas wine at **Messina Hof**. Established in 1977, it's the third-oldest vineyard in the state and has played an instrumental role in the growing industry.

STAY

At two recent openings in College Station's Century Square, accommodations come doused in regional influence. **The George**

is a boutique hotel named for the famous Georges in Texas history, but especially for George H.W. Bush, whose presidential library sits on the A&M campus. It's filled with thought-provoking art, starting with a floor-to-ceiling Texas flag built of 10,000 books about the state, which flanks the entryway. Life-sized plastic sheep, some graffitied by Houston artist GONZO247, represent the agriculture component of A&M and are made for moving around the hotel.

Next door sits the George's younger, more casual sibling, **Cavalry Court**. The motor lodge-style hotel borrows inspiration from A&M's military history (it was founded as a military



MESSINA HOF

college). The barracks theme is carried in details large and small, from a lobby coffee table filled with plastic green army men to the Canteen Bar & Grill. At night, unwind around one of the fire pits with a DIY s'mores kit, offered complimentary to guests.



THE GEORGE

Bryan-College Station by the Numbers

64,882 Students enrolled at Texas A&M university, as of spring 2019.

113,564 Population of College Station.

84,021 Population of Bryan.

95 Miles from College Station to Houston. (It's **106** to Austin and **180** to Dallas.)

1876 Year A&M opened its doors (though plans for the university were underway in the Republic of Texas back in **1839**). College Station was subsequently founded and built around the school.

102,733 Seating capacity of Kyle Field, the highest in the SEC and fourth-highest in the country for college stadiums.

128 Estimated age of the so-called Century Tree on the A&M campus. It's thought to have been planted in **1891**, making it nearly as old as the university itself.