

A Review of Native Hostel, Austin's New Boutique Hostel

The East Side spot has plenty of stuff locals can enjoy

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My name is Laurel, and I'm a grown-ass adult who stays in hostels. This is less about my enthusiasm for wearing flip-flops in the shower (you can never be too careful), and more about a desire for a sense of place and community when I travel, combined with my modest writer's income.

As a food and travel writer and frequent visitor to Austin (with a

relocation to the capital city planned for early 2018), I'd rather spend my money on great food, outdoor pursuits, live music, and a well-made cocktail or three than a pricey hotel room. I've stayed in my share of hostels, and unfortunately, there's a reason the term has negative connotations for most Americans.

Even when backpacker digs are great—a prime example is Austin's [Firehouse Lounge & Hostel](#)—after one's early 20s, they lose much of their charm, as attributes like privacy, tranquility, proper sanitation, and ambiance become the criteria by which we choose accommodations, even if we're on a budget. Airbnb is great, but depending upon the destination, it can be too costly or inconveniently located.

I crashed at the Firehouse in April, while attending [Austin Food & Wine Festival](#). It wasn't my first stay there, and as hostels go, it's above average on all counts. It's also ridiculously affordable for Austin (dorm beds start at \$31) and centrally located. I've met some cool people while staying there.

The downside? It's position near the corner of Brazos and East Sixth Streets, combined with the ground floor bar, makes for serious noise into the wee hours, as do the drunk guests who forget to use their inside voices. I've longed for an alternative that was less "Spring Breakers" and more "Welcome to the Neighborhood."

Enter [Native Hostel](#), Austin's newest accommodation and the nation's only dedicated boutique hostel brand. The East Side "experiential luxury hostel" opened in mid-May and has already become a community hub for visitors *and* locals, which is exactly what local owners Michael Dickson, Antonio Madrid, and Will Steakley had in mind.



Their collective vision was to renovate a historic space that would “bring high style and progressive programming to affordable travel [for guests 21 and over],” and foster interaction between locals and travelers. In other words, the kind of place Austinites--especially those living nearby--would visit to socialize, work remotely, and have a delicious, reasonably priced drink or meal.

A successful NextSeed campaign helped bring the owners’ vision to fruition, turning a two-story, 19th-century limestone building and surrounding mid-century warehouse into a 12-room hostel with a 4,000-square-foot communal space and adjacent bar and kitchen. An additional 14,000 square feet is being developed as a music and event venue.

Stroll into the light-filled Parlor, which serves as lobby, coffee shop, and lounge, and it’s like being in someone’s mod-Bohemian living room: Tangles of tropical plants, oversized velvet and leather sofas and opulent textiles are offset by tramp art woodwork, whimsical paintings, gold leaf mirrors, custom light fixtures, and a copper-topped espresso bar.

The private hostel areas are equally stylish, if less embellished. Lodging consists of four- and six-person dorms, and four loft-style rooms that can be rented as suites or shared spaces (there are 65 beds in all, which can accommodate up to 70 people). There’s also a well-equipped kitchen and 16-foot-long communal dining table.

“This all sounds like a hipster nightmare,” you might be thinking. It’s Austin, so yes, there’s the whiff of artisan beard oil; and you might find Native’s motto, “Curating a culture of F*** Yes!” a tad juvenile or, at the very least, incongruent with the thoughtfully cultivated ambiance. These are but niggling details.

In fact, Native’s clientele is refreshingly diverse, and the vibe and staff genuinely welcoming. I spent five nights in a dorm while attending [Hot Luck Fest](#). Native had only been open for a week when I checked in on a Wednesday afternoon, but you’d never have guessed that from the smooth and efficient service demonstrated by every employee I encountered.

One of the things Native gets right is not trying to be everything to everyone. “We’re not a typical budget traveler’s accommodation,” says manager Margaret Burke. “Our demographic is for travelers 25 to 40- people who might not be able to afford one of the higher-priced boutique hotels in town, but they value the design, attention and spirit of boutique travel, and want to use their budget to indulge in the food, music and culture that Austin has to offer, rather than spending a lot of money on a room.”



Native Bar & Kitchen has a menu of “hyper-American diner” offerings like a delectable grilled sandwich with pimento cheese and tomato (\$8); a stellar breakfast sandwich of fried chicken topped with a sunny side-up egg and roasted serrano chili gravy (\$8), and daily specials like smoked pork tacos with chimichurri, grilled pineapple, Fresno chile and red onions (\$6). A continental breakfast of coffee and biscuits with butter and housemade jam is included for hostel guests.

The bar program focuses on local draft beers and an abbreviated but appealing craft cocktail menu. I recommend the deceptively strong grapefruit negroni (\$10) or Mez-Can Martini made with mezcal, orange liqueur, lime, olive, sea salt foam (\$10).

Native’s programming is already underway, including avant-garde film screenings, Sunday night “Twin Peaks” views (featuring housemade cherry pie, for you diehards out there), collaborative DJ sets with live accompaniment from local musicians, and weekly tubing expeditions. Clearly, Native is on to something, which is great, because additional properties are in the works.

The brand is hoping to expand to New Orleans, Denver, and Nashville, maintaining its focus on sense of place, adaptive reuse (an old church is being scouted for the latter location) and employing locals who, says Burke, “act as ambassadors for the city. That’s what we’re doing here in Austin. Guests can find out about events and things of interest they might not otherwise hear about, but locals can also learn from them. That connection is really what drives this space.”

Native Hostel, 807 E. Fourth St., (512) 551-9947, nativehostels.com. Beds start at \$59 per night.

See a ton of photos of Native Hostel below!



