

Aquatic Austin

Paddle your way around the capital city

By Kathryn Streeter

AFTER LIVING IN AND paddleboarding around Austin, Texas, for a few years, I realize how deeply I'd absorbed the psyche of the city from that vantage point. In fact, I would argue that paddleboarding presents the city in fresh, interesting ways, inviting travelers to know it

more intimately.

To help deepen your appreciation for Austin, hop aboard a standup paddleboard (SUP) and onto the Colorado River, Lady Bird Lake or Barton Springs. Consider these five waterfront rental companies operating along the Ann and Roy Butler Hike-and-Bike Trail, Austin's 10-mile river-hugging path. For post-SUP refreshments, each operator offers a favorite establishment:



LIVE LOVE PADDLE

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A personable operation on the south bank of the Colorado River, **Live Love Paddle** (livelovepaddle.com) was opened in 2009 by wife/husband team Beverley and Casey Vick. Its policies reflect a distinctive customer-friendly orientation. For example, it does not charge a weekend rate on Fridays, and

it offers free storage lockers for your valuables while you're on the water. If you want a private customized tour, Live Love Paddle will make it happen.

Afterward, walk the few steps to **1618 Asian Fusion** restaurant (1618asianfusion.com), a favorite of the Vicks, where you can refuel on Pho with brisket and a tropical cocktail.



EPICSUP

On the quieter end of the river near Snake Island, where the water widens to form a cove, **EpicSUP** (epicsup.com) offers a peaceful paddleboarding experience. Manager Dale Rogers describes the location as more serene, with less water traffic, making it especially desirable for those wanting a strong nature boost. It's also a terrific choice for novices. "We spend time and teach beginners everything they need to know; no experience is necessary," Rogers says.

Rogers' go-to restaurant is **Mour Café** (mourcafe.com) for locally sourced fare and a full bar showcasing regional craft brews on tap.

EPICSUP



TEXAS ROWING CENTER

Located near Austin High School, **Texas Rowing Center** (texasrowingcenter.com) is the city's largest SUP rental operation with more than 400 paddleboards. It's perfectly placed to begin a long, lazy afternoon on the water drinking up city sights. Glide eastward past Zilker Park and under various bridges.

Owner Matt Knifton gives the nearby "Austin-casual" **Pool Burger** (poolburger.com) a hearty thumbs-up. If prompted, he'd urge you to try the cheeseburger, crinkle-cut fries and a mai tai.

MATTHEW GODWIN

AUSTIN PADDLE SHACK

If you're hoping to learn about Austin's iconic buildings and landmarks, **Austin Paddle Shack's** (austinpaddle.com) two-hour Skyline Tour will weave history and lore to educate and entertain. You'll gain a new appreciation for the city's urban architecture and explosive growth, and with the business' low guest-to-guide tour ratio,

you'll probably make some friends.

Paddle Shack co-owner Michael Fischer recommends the smoked meats at nearby **Terry Black's BBQ** (terryblacksbbq.com). Black hails from Lockhart, the unofficial barbecue capital of Texas, and the restaurant offers an authentic experience. "My favorite barbecue joint in the country, hands down," Fischer says.

CONGRESS AVENUE KAYAKS

Austin is a paddle-happy town, according to **Congress Avenue Kayaks** (congresskayaks.com) owner Darla McDonnell. The highly visible water rental business is in the Waller Creek Boathouse and occupies an enviable footprint near the Congress Avenue Bridge, home to the largest urban bat colony in North America. For the

ambitious, join the 2.5-hour guided downtown-to-Barton Springs tour, a blended urban-nature adventure that introduces you to the quiet spring-fed waterway of Austin's Barton Springs.

Afterward, McDonnell suggests heading to **Alta's Café** (altascafe.com) for a healthy, energy-boosting King Kale smoothie that "tastes like a Christmas tree — piney and woody."