

UNITED STATES

Touchdown in dazzling Dallas



Everything's bigger in Texas, even the surprises. **Kristie Kellahan** discovers a famous-on-TV metropolis that defies expectations

DALLAS, Texas. The home of cowboys, steakhouses, boot-scootin' line dancers and oil tycoons with egos as big as their bank balances. Right? Hang on a minute, the 1980s want their cliché stereotypes back.

I took my first trip to Texas last year and realised almost immediately that my impressions were out of date. I was expecting the sprawling city of Dallas to resemble the one I remember from the TV series of the same name. JR Ewing! Sue Ellen! Miss Ellie! A classic series, no doubt, but one that is now more than 35 years old.

It should come as no surprise that things have changed in Dallas, and they have changed a lot. True, Dallas is home to Cowboys, but you'll find them scoring touchdowns on the football field, not competing in a rodeo. The Dallas Cowboys, one of the richest and most successful teams in the NFL league, play home games at AT&T Stadium in nearby Arlington.

Steakhouses can be found, and the beef is undeniably delicious, whether served barbecue-brisket style at Pecan Lodge (expect long queues here) or as a juicy bone-in ribeye at Stampede 66. But steak isn't the only thing on the menu in Dallas. In a rapidly expanding city of close to 1.3 million international tastes and influences are propelling the dining scene forward in exciting ways.

At Malai Kitchen, Thai/Vietnamese fusion is presented in creative ways including juicy seared scallop pad thai and massaman-braised lamb shank served with peanut tamarind curry. Proprietors Braden and Yasmin Wages (he has been featured on Food Network) travelled extensively in South-East Asia and wanted to bring the fresh, savoury and sometimes spicy flavours back to a city that had not been known for its exotic fare.

Over at the Trinity Groves precinct, an inspired concept in hospitality is developing the careers of novice entrepreneurs and chefs. Phil Romano, a veteran restaurateur, has created the Restaurant Concept Incubator program to provide support, advice, and a place to operate from for aspiring start-ups in the foodie realm.

In what was formerly industrial warehouses, there are now bustling restaurants and cafes serving everything from yum cha to crab cakes and red velvet cookies. They built it,

the crowds came, and as a result, real estate prices in the area are on the rise.

In fact, development is booming in the city, if the cranes and construction sites are any indication. Fortunes are made in real estate, as well as the more traditional oilfields, and the good news for Joe Average is philanthropy has never been more in vogue.

Many of Dallas's museums and galleries are free to enter, thanks to generous corporate and individual patrons. Exhibit A: Dallas Museum of Art is not to be missed for its extensive collections of American and international art, and with free entry, there's no excuse not to stop by.

The Perot Museum of Nature and Science, while not free to enter, was made possible by a \$US50 million (\$A70 million) donation from the Perot family (patriarch Ross Perot is best known for his independent run for president in 1992) and now entertains while educating kids and adults alike about the world we live in.

Home to the largest urban arts district in the US – it spans 19 contiguous blocks – Dallas is also the place to find a serene sculpture park, an eclectic collection of Asian art and historic trams that once travelled the streets of Melbourne.

At Klyde Warren Park, a dynamic public green space has been created to replace a concrete wasteland atop a freeway overpass. It now hums with free yoga classes, outdoor movies and an open-air lending library.

Respect for art and artists is evident also at the city's hotels. Dotted throughout the rooms, public spaces and on-site gallery of Fairmont Dallas are original works and striking sculptures, each chosen to tell a story about the city and its cultural values. The luxury hotel takes its commitment to art a step further than most with its own artist-in-residence program. The 25th-floor penthouse suite is reserved for a resident artist, who lives in the Fairmont for three months and in addition to making their own art,

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LIVEABLE CITY: Dallas residents enjoying Klyde Warren Park which has been built on reclaimed wasteland; and (top left) inside the Ewing mansion at Southfork Ranch.

interacts with guests and shares their inspiration. It's a generous and visionary program and so far more than a dozen artists have benefited from their extended hotel stays.

As for the boot-scootin' line dancers I was expecting, the only pink knee-high cowgirl boots I saw were on a British tourist. She was exploring the Sixth Floor Museum, the infamous Dallas location where Lee Harvey Oswald perched to aim his rifle at John F. Kennedy's passing motorcade on that fateful day in November 1963. Her next stop was to be an event centre that contains the original Ewing Mansion, where *Dallas* was filmed.

The writer travelled with the assistance of Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau.

ESCAPE ROUTE

DALLAS

GETTING THERE

Qantas flies direct from Sydney to Dallas/Fort Worth.
See qantas.com.au

STAYING THERE

Fairmont Dallas is ideally located in the heart of the downtown Dallas Arts District. Top restaurants, shopping, entertainment and museums are within a few minutes' walk of the hotel. Don't miss the innovative, delicious breakfast

menu at the hotel's Pyramid Restaurant.
See fairmont.com/dallas

SIGHTSEEING

Dallas CityPASS offers entry to some of the best attractions in the city for the reduced price of \$US44 (\$A61) an adult. Don't miss the Perot Museum of Nature and Science, Reunion Tower and The Sixth Floor Museum.
See citypass.com

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