



✦ The Stax museum in Memphis showcases more than 2000 cultural artefacts, music exhibits, and memorabilia. (RIGHT) The motel room at the Lorraine Motel where Martin Luther King Jr was staying the night of his death.

PHOTOS: CONTRIBUTED



# Classic reflections of America in Memphis

Museums and memorabilia trace history



**TRAVEL**  
with John Bishop

**T**HE magnificent museums of Memphis tell a compelling story. It's hard to find a more challenging story in modern times than the struggle by African Americans for their civil rights in the South of the United States.

At the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis the story is told with historical pictures and sound archives, video and actual news footage, testimony from witnesses and participants, and it is told brilliantly.

The museum is built around the Lorraine Motel, where civil rights leader Dr Martin Luther King was staying the night he was killed. Back in 1968 that was in the black part of town,

Memphis being a segregated city.

King had come to Memphis to support a strike by black sanitation workers for better pay and pension rights.

He stepped on to the balcony of his first floor motel room at just after 6pm on April 3, 1968, and called out to a man below, a musician called Ben Branch and asked him to play Precious Lord on his saxophone at the church service that evening, and "play it sweet", King asked.

A shot rang out from across the street and King fell down. He died about an hour later without ever speaking again.

At the end of the tour of the history of slavery, segregation, discrimination, hangings, beatings, and killings, and after a hundred years of struggle for racial equality, you look through glass into Room 306, where King's coffee cup is on the bedside table, bed partly turned down, just as it was that night in 1968.

A local activist called D'Army Bailey scraped together the money to buy the motel, and then raised \$9.7 million to

establish the museum, which opened in 1991 and was extensively revamped in 2012.

Visitors can sit at a lunch counter and watch 1960s video of protestors being trained in non-violent resistance. They would later sit at

whites-only counters in restaurants and refuse to leave until they were served. You can sit on a replica city bus next to Rosa Parkes, the black woman who refused to give up her seat in the whites-only section of the bus.

Utterly worth a visit. The story of Stax Records is a positive one; how a dream of an independent record label for black artists became a reality, a real cultural force that helped reshape music and made the label, its owners, its stars and its special brand of soul music into a commercial and social success, and later helped foster black consciousness in the 1970s.

Jim Stewart and his sister Estelle Axton began the business as Satellite Records in 1957, recording country and pop music, but changed the name to Stax in 1961 and started recording R&B and soul. After two changes of ownership, the label folded in 1975.

The museum is more than a story of a defunct record company.

It traces the history of soul from its gospel roots (gospel turned secular is one definition) to how Stax developed its unique Southern soul sound – and made it different from its main competitor, the Detroit-based Motown Records.

Booker T and the MGs (remember Green Onions) were the house band, including the legendary Steve Cropper on lead guitar, who was also a producer, writer and arranger, and Donald "Duck" Dunn on bass.

Otis Redding was their single biggest star, but the line-up included Rufus and Carla Thomas, the Mar-Keys, and Isaac Hayes.

Culturally, the label was a huge success for black artists. Commercially distribution deals with Atlantic records and Warner Bros turned sour, and the company collapsed in 1975.

The self-guided tour shows the progress of a separate and special musical genre.

\* John Bishop visited Memphis at his own expense. He blogs on his travel experiences at [www.eatdrinktravel.co.nz](http://www.eatdrinktravel.co.nz)

## SOUTH AMERICA



### 16-day South America luxury cruise with Scenic

THERE are only a few days remaining for cruise travellers to take advantage of the earlybird offers to South America, which end on September 30.

Guests can enjoy a "partner fly free" offer in economy class on South America tours of more than 16 days plus there are airfare credits of up to \$1500 per couple on all other tours of more than 12 days.

Offers are also available for the solo traveller, and there are business class upgrades from just \$4195 per person return.

In addition, Scenic has opened a new 2016 departure for its 20-day icons of South America tour – September 12, 2016. Visit Peru's World Heritage site of Machu Picchu, the Sacred Valley for three nights, Cuzco – the historical capital of the Inca Empire and Lake Titicaca; the spectacular Iguazu Falls and the cities of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro.

✦ **PRICES:** From \$12,795 per person twin share.

✦ **MORE DETAILS:** 138 128 or [scenic.com.au](http://scenic.com.au).

## FLORIDA



### Cruise the theme parks

FIRST, you jet to Orlando in Florida to enjoy all the fun of Universal Studios, complete with a three-night stay in a four-star hotel and a day pass to the studios.

Then board Norwegian Cruise Line's Norwegian Spirit and sail away on a 14-night cruise. The whole holiday lasts 18 nights, includes flights from Sydney or Brisbane.

✦ **COST:** \$4399

✦ **MORE DETAILS:** Departs April 20, 2016.

[www.worldwidecruisecentres.com.au](http://www.worldwidecruisecentres.com.au)