

INSTRUCTIONS--South Austin is that part of Austin south of the Colorado River. North of the Colorado is Central Austin. In today's lesson, you'll read about fun things to do in trendy South Austin while you learn lots of slang and vocabulary words. Read this article one paragraph at a time. Discuss the underlined vocabulary and any other words or phrases that you don't understand. Talk about any of these places you have been. Are there other "trendy" places that are not mentioned in the article?

## SoCo Austin Neighborhood South Congress Avenue

It may be hard for visitors to Austin's vibrant, creative and hip neighborhood known as SoCo to believe, but just a few years ago South Congress Avenue was a little seedy, a place where businesses had slumped and a couple of motels rented rooms by the hour. The days of headlines about naughty state legislators out on the town caught up in police sweeps are long gone. Now those restored South Congress motels are likely to be renting rooms to high tech execs and movie stars. The South Congress Avenue neighborhood has a new image and a hip name to match. South Congress continues to march south beyond Oltorf, the official southern boundary, and new South Congress apartments and businesses are being built all the way to St. Edward's University.

The view of downtown Austin from atop the rising wide sweep of South Congress Avenue is a grabber with the State Capitol providing an exclamation point on the horizon. And literally walking distance from this same point is the beautiful Town Lake Hike and Bike Trail. The broad avenue is lined with apartments, condos, lofts, plus boutiques, funky "junque" stores, restaurants, neighborhood bars and coffee shops. Thankfully a few longtime businesses have survived the slump and blossomed in the boom, including the venerable Magnolia Cafe, where the affordable menu reflects Austin's hippie roots 24 hours a day.

One of the most famous SoCo Austin landmarks on the avenue is the Continental Club, a smoky bat cave of a place where many top musical acts have launched their careers. (Speaking of bats, they hang out under the Congress Avenue Bridge) The old St. Vincent de Paul thrift shop remains and avenue bargain hunting has been given a boost by shops like Uncommon Objects which busts at the seams with recycled junque and kitsch. First Thursday is not just a day on the monthly calendar in SoCo, but marks a local tradition when shops stay open late, playing host to an array of events and activities.

SoCo's boundaries run from just South of Town Lake on the North and to Oltorf in the South, then West to South First Street and along the eastern edge of Congress Avenue. It is sandwiched between two of Austin's unique neighborhoods, Travis Heights to the East and Bouldin Creek to the West, the former a high-priced neighborhood of older homes, the latter, a little more affordable. In typical Austin fashion, SoCo has a unique neighborhood grocery, Farm-to-Market on the avenue which sells local produce, plus there is a large H.E.B. at Oltorf and Congress. On the southern and western edges of SoCo, particularly along South First are businesses that reflect the Hispanic influence in many of South Austin's neighborhoods -- Mexican grocery stores and bakeries, family restaurants and even a dance club or two.

Austin's past is being preserved and even redefined in SoCo. So, for breakfast, South Congress residents can head to El Sol y La Luna, the wonderful patio cafe adjacent to the Austin Motel on the avenue where Julia Roberts has been sighted on occasion.

New developments along the northern border near the Texas School for the Deaf have brought in well-known national names like Starbucks, but, with the creative persistence that marks life

in Austin, homegrown businesses, like Jo's Coffee, have burst onto the scene and become instant local landmarks by immersing themselves in the neighborhood. In Jo's case that means sponsoring fashion shows featuring South Congress designers and summer movies in the parking lot.

A few familiar faces have been driven away by high business rents, but others like Fran's drive-in hamburger joint have hung on and are now part of the restaurant mix with places like Vespaio, noted for its antipasto bar, and its sister cafe, Enoteca. Residents of South Congress apartments can dine upscale or down in SoCo, pizza by the slice, sushi, veggies to go, or three course dinners with vintage wine.

Same goes for shopping. South Congress was a haven for retro clothing before it became SoCo. Lucy in Disguise with Diamonds and Electric Ladyland (that's the store's complete name) is where Bob Dylan is rumored to have shopped for retro outfits. New Bohemia is another retro spot for clothes and home furnishings, plus there are new boutiques including Blackmail, for all things black, and Vivid, for all things... well vivid.

Music and movie stars present and future are not the only big names to shop in SoCo. The El Presidente taco and tamale plate at Guero's is named in honor of President Bill Clinton who occasionally stops in at the popular top of Congress Avenue restaurant. But SoCo is not a star-gazing neighborhood, but rather one that attracts residents and visitors because it just captures the Austin vibe.