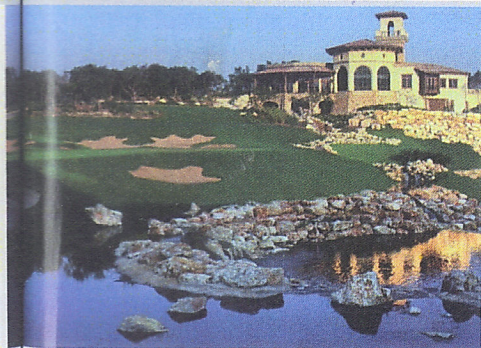


with eagles and hawks soaring overhead. On the par-3 signature 12th hole, I'm at one with these bird's-eye views, at 155 yards in distance, the drive begins with an elevated tee shot and a panorama of the Valley below – stretching all the way from Oliver, B.C., to Oroville, Wash. When making your club selection, take into account the swirling valley winds and elevation; it can vary anywhere from a sand wedge to a five iron. The bonus? The unique desert climate allows for near year-round golf, a rarity in Canada.

But it's not just heights to fear. I got the drill from the pro shop: if you happen to stumble upon a rattlesnake, step back and leave the snake alone. Sounds obvious, but I had heard stories of golfers trying to get up-close-and-personal with the creatures. www.golfosoyoos.com; www.watermarkbeachresort.com



lined on both sides by mature trees. The approach shot on the same hole requires an accurate shot to the postage stamp-sized green guarded along its full length by a creek, flowing waterfalls and rock formations. My playing partner informed me that Texas is known for having its share of premium golf courses in the affordable US\$70 to \$140 price-per-round range and that we had just played one of the local gems. www.lacanteragolfclub.com 

PHOTOGRAPHY: LUIS ALBUQUERQUE (GOLF BALL); GEMS/REDFERNS (PRESLEY); RB/REDFERNS (PRESLEY FAMILY);

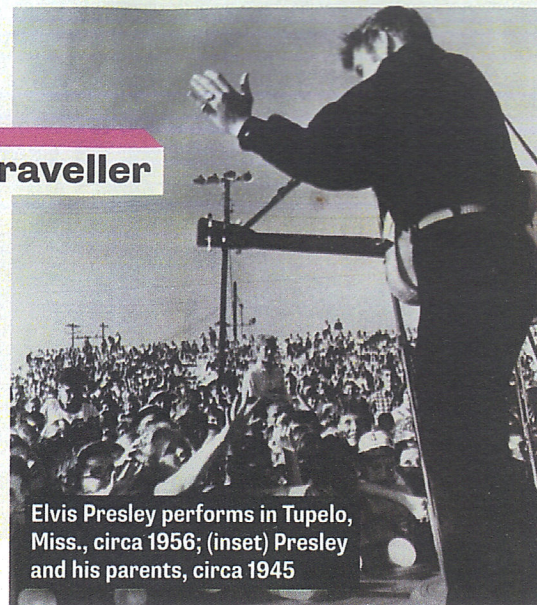
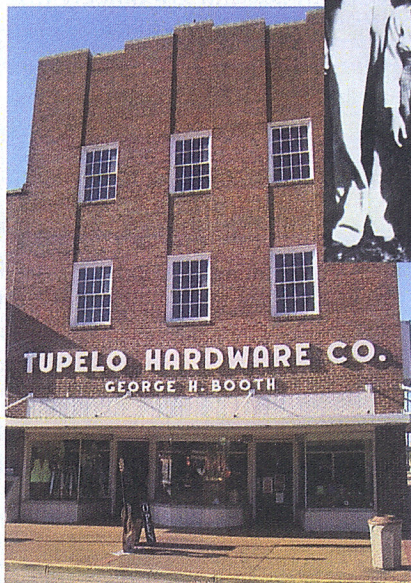
Elvis Savvy Traveller Was Here

IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE to resist stepping on the large X on the creaky, wooden floorboards in the Tupelo Hardware. The shelving hasn't changed much in half a century – there are cast iron skillets, cans of turpentine, glues and a whirligig where shoppers scoop out nails sold by the pound. This family-owned main-street hardware has been serving locals for three generations, but the X has its own magnetic pull.

Locals call this X the cradle of rock 'n' roll. Young Elvis stood here in 1945 when his mother brought him in to buy a birthday present. A rifle was too expensive, so they bought a guitar for \$7.90. He changed music as it was known *forever*.

Tiny Tupelo is not the place that first comes to mind when thinking of the blues. But consider this – for many mainstream white-bread listeners in the late 1950s, Elvis Presley was the conduit channelling the blues sounds of the Mississippi Delta out of their radios and into their living rooms. And the blues birthed rock 'n' roll.

Roger Stolle, author of *Hidden History of Mississippi Blues*, couldn't



Elvis Presley performs in Tupelo, Miss., circa 1956; (inset) Presley and his parents, circa 1945

agree more. "When I was 10 years old, I was a Presley guy. Aug. 17, 1977, was the first time I paid attention to music because he was everywhere. What I didn't realize is what I liked of his music wasn't the Hollywood years, wasn't the Las Vegas years – it was really the Mississippi-moving-to-Memphis years. So, it was the blues."

Presley would have been 80 years old in 2015 – and Tupelo will roll out the red carpet to commemorate the date. He grew up poor, in a two-room shotgun shack surrounded by cotton fields in a family where church and gospel music held sway. The soulful

strains of gospel have always been deeply intertwined with the blues of the Delta – both tell of joy and of sorrow.

"The blues is the truth, the basis of everything in life, so everyone can relate to it," explains Stolle. "It's also the foundation of almost all popular music – certainly American popular music – so everyone's been touched by it whether they know it or not."

Take a few steps back from the Presley era to look at the germinating spot of the music we recognize as the blues. The blues came out of field hollers and work songs, slaves singing as they worked on the Southern plan- ➤



Zooming TRAVEL



Morgan Freeman's Ground Zero Blues Club in Clarksdale; B.B. King, 1948

For more stories, go to www.everythingzoomer.com/great-music-trails.

tations. The genre – a stew of African oral traditions and gospel, expressed through the pain of their lot.

As Stolle tells it, the blues is first and foremost about *feeling*. “It’s not about technique, although you need a certain amount of technique to express that feeling. If you’d heard the earliest bluesmen just playing on a Saturday night at a juke joint out on a plantation, like a Charlie Patton, he tuned his guitar to express his feeling and what worked with his voice at the time. It was just spontaneous.”

The Delta bluesmen – in places like Greenville, Clarksdale, Indianola – say that when you wrap all that feeling up, you create something that’s timeless. “The blues will never go away – that’s an absolute fact,” insists Stolle. “It just permeates everything, whether you realize it or not, recognize it or not. But what *is* going away and *will* go away are the culturally connected guys who actually were there and lived to tell about it. That’s what the door is closing on. It’s generational, but we’re really reaching the last generations that actually grew up in the exact same environment as Charlie Patton, Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters.”

Clarksdale – as blues fanatics know – is the wellspring of the Delta blues. This is the spot of the infamous crossroads where, according to legend, that 1930s blues player Robert Johnson sold his soul to the devil in return for unbeatable guitar chops. These

days, the blues tradition Johnson unleashed still thrives across the Delta. In small-town Clarksdale, bars like Red’s Lounge and the Ground Zero Blues Club (co-owned by the actor Morgan Freeman) do a roaring business. Blues musicians from across the country vie for the chance to play at the town’s annual Juke Joint Festival.

“Robert (Wolfman) Belfour is an example,” says Stolle. “A man who grew up on a cotton plantation, worked hard his whole life, grew up in a black rural church in Mississippi, listening to that music. The guys of that era, they are going away. The message of Mississippi today is you have to come *now* to experience it.”

Even if you don’t know Wolfman Belfour, you know the Delta blues. You know it because you most certainly know the unmistakable blues feel of Riley King.

King is one of those “guys of that era,” the ones who are quickly disappearing. He knows firsthand the hardscrabble sun-up-to-sun-down toil told by the blues. As a boy in the

1920s and ’30s, he laboured with his sharecropper father driving a tractor on a Mississippi plantation. For extra coin, he played his guitar on the streets of Indianola where the blues provided the soundtrack for Saturday nights. Before long, he was playing the local juke joints and building a reputation for himself as the “Blues Boy” so that by 1946 – when he moved north to Memphis – he had come to be known as B.B. King.

He’s still touring, still recording and still bringing the Delta blues to his numberless fans. Every sweltering Mississippi summer, the octogenarian headlines a concert outside the renovated cotton gin in his hometown of Indianola. Fans crowd the lawn to hear the world-renowned bluesman caress *Lucille*, perhaps the best-known blues guitar of all time. This large brick cotton gin houses the B.B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center – perhaps the finest museum of the blues anywhere in the nation – and is filled with multimedia displays including film clips, wardrobe pieces, guitars, photographs, journals and even King’s well-travelled tour bus.

The old gin has become a modern-day treasury of blues history. The same could be said about almost every small town and juke joint across the Delta. Stolle’s words ring true: here, in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, the blues permeates everything. www.visitthedelta.com; www.visitmississippi.org — Josephine Matyas and Craig Jones

What to Pack



CARRY ON Drink this. Caudalie Paris’ new night oils use the company’s trademark vinotherapie (that’s made with wine grapeseed oils, just in case you didn’t know). Ladies and gents can use the non-greasy omega 6- and polyphenol-packed Overnight Recovery Oil on a red-eye flight to help restore thirsty jet-lagged skin, as well as at the hotel as an elixir that softens a beard (or even your legs, ladies) pre-shave. \$55 —Vivian Vassos