

Houston: Super Beyond The Super Bowl

Starting January 28 for nine days, thousands of people will converge daily on downtown Houston to participate in Super Bowl LIVE!, a free fan festival in Discovery Green Park. Those enjoying the live music and performances, interactive exhibits and great food may be interested to know they're in one of the premiere urban parks in the United States that was a catalyst for development in the eastern part of downtown. In fact, Discovery Green is a great starting point for a visitor walking tour.

Page, a multidisciplinary architecture and engineering firm with a local office, was tapped to design the built architecture on the former 12-acre parking lot. The LEED Gold-certified park includes The Grove restaurant as well as two other principal buildings, all of which parallel an allee of century-old oak trees. Discovery Green faces the George R. Brown Convention Center which recently received a new glass-dominated façade and grand entrance designed by Team Hoke Architecture & Consulting that opens it up for dramatic skyline views. Looking inside, Page Senior Project Architect Tami Merrick's commissioned artwork is visible along with several others.

The adjacent Marriott Marquis Hotel, which recently opened to the public, has drawn a great deal of attention for its design by Morris Architects. The hotel boasts a Texas-shaped lazy river adjacent to an outdoor infinity edge pool, multiple event lawns and design features to integrate Discovery Green. It's also the site of six popular new restaurants. From there, fans can jump on a free Houston Greenlink shuttle headed to the west side of downtown, so named because its fleet runs on compressed natural gas. Alternatively, they can walk two blocks north to Minute Maid Park Stadium, home of the Houston Astros. The hurricane-safe retractable roof is a distinctive element of the Populous Architects project.

Six blocks to the west is the historic Rice, the original site of the Capitol of the Republic of Texas. For much of the 1900s, it served as a hotel and is well known for hosting President John F. Kennedy the day before he was assassinated in 1963. In the 1990s, Page redeveloped the then-vacant building into residential lofts and recently completed another renovation for a new owner.

Directly opposite The Rice is the JP Morgan Chase Tower, formerly known as the Texas Commerce Tower. When noted architect I.M. Pei designed it in the late 1970s, the FAA was concerned the 75-floor building could pose a risk for aircraft traveling en route to or from nearby Hobby Airport. Today, it remains the tallest building in the state of Texas.

Both Greenlink riders and those on foot can walk two blocks to distinctive Pennzoil Place, designed by iconic architect Philip Johnson. The postmodern black-glassed twin towers grace the skyline from every vantage point and house multiple corporate tenants and restaurants. The high-velocity elevators are not to be missed for either their design or function. Literally across the street is another Johnson project, the dramatically different Bank of America Center. Also considered postmodern, it's reminiscent of the Gothic architecture of canal houses in The Netherlands. Its three gabled rooflines are all topped off with spires.

Two more blocks to the west is the glass-fronted Hobby Center for Performing Arts, designed after the millennium by yet another noted architect, Robert A. M. Stern. It serves as one of the crown jewels in the largest theater district in the US outside of New York City. The Hobby Center is sited on the edge of the commercial downtown district, boundaried by the Gulf Freeway. However, the city's largest waterway, Buffalo Bayou, links it to Buffalo Bayou Park, a linear 2.3 mile, 160-acre park for which Page also designed the built architecture.



The entrance from downtown Houston to Buffalo Bayou Park is at The Water Works, a two-story structure with a rooftop deck that showcases a dramatic view of the nearby skyline. Below The Water Works lawn is the recently re-discovered "Cistern," one of the City of Houston's early underground drinking-water reservoir which had been unused for decades. Page adapted the space for visitors, giving it an accessible entrance and a walkway around the interior perimeter of the 87,500-square-foot expanse, giving a view of the rows of 25-foot tall concrete columns which stand in a few inches of water on the reservoir's floor. A light and sound art installation, *Rain* by Magdalena Fernandez, is currently on exhibit through June 2017.

At this point, visitors can proceed along hike or bike trails through the park to Lost Lake, a re-established lake overlooking the bayou. There, a kayak rental, visitor center and The Dunlavy restaurant's stunning views through its glass façade and patio alike provide a respite from the urban activity literally feet away on the other side of the landscaping. Alternatively, bicycles are available from the City of Houston Bicycle sharing program kiosk at The Water Works or Uber is available to return to Discovery Green.

Regardless of how you choose to experience downtown Houston, we hope you enjoy it!

