



# TRAVEL LINE with Carol Timblin

A huge microphone stands next to a big black spot on the floor of Sun Records, known as the Memphis Recording Services in the 1950s. It marks the place where a poor high school graduate named Elvis Aaron Presley paid \$4 to record "My Happiness" in 1953.

"That's All Right, Mama," which he recorded in the same studio a year later, became an immediate hit, thanks to Dewey Phillips, a Memphis DJ, who played it 17 times on his *Red Hot and Blue* radio show. Over the course of his career, Elvis sold millions of records, starred in 31 Hollywood films, and became an icon of American pop culture.

History was also made at Sun Records in late 1954, when Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, and Johnny Cash showed up one day and did some impromptu jamming. Sam Phillips, who owned the recording studio, let the tapes run and called in a photographer from the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* to shoot the now-famous picture of the foursome. However, it was not until after Elvis's death in 1977 that copies of the tapes surfaced. The "Million Dollar Quartet" was first released in 1981, followed by "Elvis Presley: The Million Dollar Quarter" in 1990. The first and only recording session of the famous musicians is now the subject of a smash hit play appearing at the Apollo Theatre in Chicago and the Nederlander Theatre in New York ([www.milliondollarquartetlive.com](http://www.milliondollarquartetlive.com)).

Today, streams of visitors arrive at the studio at 706 Union Avenue to stand on the same spot and hold the same microphone while their pictures are snapped. It is the highlight of a tour of the studio that has changed very little since the day that Elvis first set foot in the door. Visitors also tour nearby Soulsville: Stax Museum American Soul Music, which chronicles the story of stars such as Otis Redding, B. B. King, Isaac Hayes, and other giants who developed their particular music styles on Beale Street in Memphis. Lined with clubs and bars, this grungy-looking street is still one of the best places in the country to hear original music.

Every day visitors show up in huge numbers at Graceland, where Elvis died 33 years ago. This month, on the anniversary of his death, thousands of fans will gather at the singer's home, as they usually do, to pay their respects and to celebrate 75 years of Elvis at Graceland ([www.Elvis.com](http://www.Elvis.com)). Three tour choices are available — the Elvis Entourage VIP Tour, Graceland Platinum Tour, and Graceland Mansion Tour. Graceland's gift shops feature Elvis CDs, DVDs, books, and collectibles. Several restaurants on site serve Memphis-area food, including peanut butter and banana sandwiches, an Elvis favorite. A stay at the Heartbreak Hotel, across the street from the mansion, promises to enhance the Elvis experience. Regular guest rooms feature a black-and-white décor, photographs of Elvis, and a 24-hour Elvis movie channel. The hotel also offers four suites — Graceland, Burning Love, Hollywood, and Gold and Platinum. ([www.Elvis.com](http://www.Elvis.com))

The International Rock-a-Billy Hall of Fame, located east of Memphis in Jackson, also has a vast collection of original records, music memorabilia, and photographs of the stars, including Elvis, who created the rockabilly sound of the 50s — a combination of rock and hillbilly music. ([www.rockabillyhall.org](http://www.rockabillyhall.org))

Even though the weather was extremely hot in Memphis, we enjoyed seeing the city sights aboard the *Memphis Queen* riverboat ([www.memphisriverboats.net](http://www.memphisriverboats.net)). Near the boat landing is the Mississippi River Museum, which tells the story of the river valley from its early settlement some 10,000 years ago. Mud Island River Park,

also here, offers a river walk, kayak and boat rentals, and more. ([www.mudisland.com](http://www.mudisland.com))

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# TRAVEL LINE

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