

# Houston: king of the jumble

The exhilarating, eclectic bayou city

By Pat Livingston

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HOUSTON — They still wonder here why singer Diahann Carroll belted out *New York, New York* at the grand opening of The Wortham Center, Houston's twin-masterpiece theaters for opera and ballet.

The song met with scattered

## TEXAS TRAVELS

boos. Houston is not New York and doesn't wish to be. Rather, it's a proud, sprawling city fueled by the pride, money and will-do spirit of its citizens.

Ironically, Houston was founded by a pair of New Yorkers, John and Augustus Allen, brothers who arrived in 1836 at what is now downtown and decided the placid river called Buffalo Bayou would be the nation's newest ship channel.

The Allens were right, though not about the actual location for the port.

### Houston boasts

Today, Houston's 3 million residents make it the nation's fourth largest city. It's also the third busiest port, first in foreign tonnage.

Houstonians also boast that the world's largest medical complex, Texas Medical Center, is here. The world's longest Main Street at 37 miles is in Houston. The first word transmitted to the world from the surface of the moon was "Houston." And this is one of the few American cities that supports permanent companies in theater, symphony, ballet and opera.

### Stunning downtown

Downtown Houston, with its astounding skyscrapers, is stunning, but can be intimidating to first-time travelers. Strongly recommended: a Gray Line bus tour.

While you tour the city's downtown, suburbs and Astrodomaine, your guide will tell about the Allen brothers, Ima Hogg, Gus Wortham, Lillie and Roy Cullen, Jesse Jones, George Hermann, George Brown, Nina Vance, Roy Hofheinz, Gerald Hines, Dominique de Menil and others whose contributions and foundations are still building Houston.

### City of the unzoned

The best and worst thing about Houston is that everything is everywhere. The city is unzoned. Vietnamese restaurants, auto-repair shops, swank banks and corporate offices all share neighborhoods. Galleria shoppers find a McDonald's nearby with a stock-exchange digital display and FAX machines to take to-go orders.

Such apparent chaos is better understood when you consider the mavericks who created this great city.

George Hermann, an early Houston lumberman whose name now graces parks and hospitals, wanted to make sure that when his workers came downtown on Friday and Saturday nights, they would not be arrested for their excesses (and subsequently miss work on Mondays).

So Mr. Hermann gave a square block of land to the city, specifying in the deed that no man could be arrested while on that land. Mr. Hermann's workers then had a place to straighten up after weekend frivolities.

To this day, when on Hermann Square, across from Houston's city hall, you cannot be arrested.

### Immense

Founding fathers such as Mr. Hermann exercised their will-do spirit to sire a rousing city of intriguing cultural variety: oil, space, shipping, fine arts, beyond-chic shopping, professional sports, amusement parks, universities, top medical centers, palatial suburbs, 100-acre flea markets and blazing auto race tracks.

Spread over 579 square miles of coastal plain, Houston is woven into an immense but touchable tapestry by its 479 miles of busy freeways.

People from all over the world live here. The city hosts an International Festival each April. There are 52 foreign consulates and eclectic, ethnic neighborhoods, including Chinatown and the Mexican marketplace, El Mercado.

Pat Livingston writes for the Texas Department of Commerce's



The George R. Brown Convention Center:

## KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** For a complete listing of things to see and do in Houston, contact the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau, 3300 Main St., Houston 77002; (713) 523-5050 or (800) 231-7799.

### SIGHTS, AMUSEMENTS:

■ **Alley Theater** — Called "one of the most striking theaters in the world" by *The New York Times*. Repertoire company presents varied productions. Arrive late and you'll lose your seat to a standby. 615 Texas Ave.

■ **Astrodome** — The world's first domed stadium. Tour luxury boxes and walk on AstroTurf. Home of Astros baseball and Oilers football. Multimillion-dollar redo added 10,000 seats and more luxury suites. 8400 Kirby Drive.

■ **AstroWorld/WaterWorld** — Near the Dome. This 75-acre theme park, with more than 100 rides, shows and events also has a 15-acre WaterWorld theme park. 9001 Kirby Drive.

■ **Bayou Bend** — One of the finest collections of American art, artifacts and furnishings. Mansion on 14 lush acres in River Oaks. Tours. 1 Westcott St.

■ **Galleria** — More than a mall, this is a Texas-chic suburb. Full-size ice rink, 300-plus shops and places to eat and twin Westin Hotel towers rising from each end. 5075 Westheimer.

■ **Neighboring Saks Pavillion** juxtaposes posh shops, 30-foot palms and Roman columns. Popular restaurants abound nearby.

■ **Hermann Park** — Expansive, tree-lined park. Site of Kipp Aquarium, zoo, outdoor theater, natural science museum, planetarium. Picnic grounds, miniature train, paddleboat rides. Where Houston plays. Fannin at Montrose streets.