

Graceland

In itself, Elvis Presley's Graceland was a surprisingly modest home for the world's most successful entertainer. It's certainly not the "mansion" you may have been led to expect, and while Elvis was clearly a man who indulged his tastes to the full, there's none of the pomposity that characterizes so many other showpiece Southern residences. Visits, run under the auspices of his widow Priscilla, are affectionate celebrations of the man; never exactly tongue in cheek, but not cloyingly reverential either. Elvis was just 22 when he paid \$100,000 for Graceland in 1957. It was then considered one of the most desirable properties in Memphis, though now the neighborhood is distinctly less exclusive, its main thoroughfare - Elvis Presley Boulevard - lined with motels, fast-food joints and surprisingly few Elvis-related souvenir shops. Tours start opposite the house in Graceland Plaza; excited visitors, kitted out with audio-cassette players, are ferried across the road in minibuses, which depart every few minutes and sweep through the musical gate in the "Wall of Love," scrawled with tens of thousands of messages from fans. The audio tours, peppered with spoken memories from Priscilla and rousing choruses from the King, allow you to spend as long as you wish - and press the rewind button as many times as you like - but it's not easy to get an accurate sense of the house's size and layout, as the upstairs rooms are out of bounds to visitors. The interior is a frozen tribute to the taste of the Seventies; choice moments include the Hawaiian-themed Jungle Room, with its waterfall and green shag-carpeted ceiling, where he recorded Moody Blue and other gems from his declining years, and the navy and lemon TV Room, mirrored and fitted with three screens that now show 1970s talk shows. In the separate Trophy Room, you parade past Elvis's platinum, gold and silver records, stage costumes, outfits from many of his 31 films, and his extensive gun collection; the tour of the interior ends with the racquetball court where he played on the morning he died. Strewn with flowers and soft toys sent daily from fans, Elvis (Jan 8, 1935 to Aug 16, 1977), his mother Gladys, his father Vernon and his grandmother are buried beside the swimming pool in the Meditation Garden outside; Elvis's body was moved here two months after his death, when the security problems inherent in keeping it in the local cemetery became obvious, though there have been recent reports that his family want to move it to a private retreat away from Graceland. The Plaza itself, resounding with nonstop Elvis hits and lined with giftshops selling velvet Elvises and heart-shaped Love Me Tender "dream pillows," holds several enjoyable related attractions: don't miss the wittily edited free film *Walk a Mile in My Shoes*, the "Sincerely Elvis" collection of personal belongings - which features a TV punctured by a bullet fired by Elvis himself (he also shot his fridge, his stereo and even Lisa Marie's slide), as well as the King's Hai Karate and Brut aftershave - and Elvis's personal airplanes, including the Lisa Marie, customized with 24-carat gold washroom and a blue suede bathroom. End your tour with a sit-down in the Elvis Presley Automobile Museum, which, quite apart from a Harley Davidson golf cart and powder pink Cadillac, has a reconstructed drive-in showing clips from his movies. Graceland Attractions Graceland is ten miles from downtown Memphis, at 3734 Elvis Presley Blvd, on bus route #13 from Third and Union streets. The ticket office is open April-Oct Mon-Sat 9am-5pm, Sun 9am-4pm; Nov-March Mon, Wed-Sun 10am-4pm, closed Tues. The last house tour starts at the ticket office's closing time while the other attractions remain open for roughly two more hours. Combined "Platinum" ticket to all attractions (allow three hours) is \$25; house tours only, \$16 (closed Tues Nov-Feb); automobile museum \$7; airplanes \$6; "Sincerely Elvis" \$5; parking fee \$2. Reservations are recommended, especially in August (tel 901/332-3322,).