

## [Novel Destinations](#)

### *Literary Landmarks from Jane Austen's Bath to Ernest Hemingway's Key West*

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## Top 5 U.S. Cities for Literary Travelers

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February 28, 2020 in [Books](#)

Does your idea of the perfect getaway combine the excitement of a city with literary pastimes? Head to one of these five coast-to-coast locales where there is plenty for book lovers to discover.

### **Washington, DC**



The Library of Congress. Photo © Novel Destinations.

Begin exploring the U.S. capital city's literary side at the [Library of Congress](#), founded in 1800 and the world's largest library. The library's palatial Thomas Jefferson Building is a visual feast with murals, mosaics, and sculpture galore and a Great Hall rising 75 feet from marble floor to stained glass ceiling. (It's well worth taking the free, docent-led tour to hear about the library's creation and collection.) Make time to visit the [Frederick Douglass National Historic Site](#), the author-orator's last residence, an estate less than a hundred miles from where he was born into slavery. Lay eyes on a rare First Folio at the [Folger Shakespeare Library](#)

and catch a production in the Elizabethan-style Folger Theatre. At indie bookstore [Politics and Prose](#), sit in on a book group discussion (no need to reserve a spot; just read the featured selection and show up) or attend one of the regularly held author events. Sustenance for mind and body can be found at [Kramerbooks](#) and the adjoining Afterwords Café, open until at least 1 a.m. daily.

## San Francisco, California



Photo © Novel Destinations.

The San Francisco literary scene is a vibrant mix of classic and contemporary. Start by stocking up on page-turners at some of the area's more than 35 bookstores, from Beat-era icon [City Lights](#) and the warren-like [Green Apple Books](#) to shops covering specific topics like culinary, comics, and science fiction. Since the literary tradition includes nearly as much imbibing as writing, enjoy a tippie at [Vesuvio](#), a cozy saloon where Jack Kerouac drank and discoursed (once so late into the evening he missed a meeting with Henry Miller in *Big Sur*). For a swankier outing, glitzy [Novela](#) has illuminated, color-coordinated bookshelves and a literary-themed cocktail menu that includes a homemade spiked punch (in honor of Hemingway) on tap. If you like your detective fiction hard-boiled, stand in the spot where Sam Spade's sidekick, Miles Archer, met his maker on the [Dashiell Hammett Walking Tour](#), or check out the [Beat Museum](#) for insight into Kerouac and his contemporaries. Time your visit with the annual autumn ["Bikes to Books"](#) tour, a 7.1-mile ride (a map is available for purchase at City Lights to go on your own anytime), or with "Boots to Books," the summer on-foot version, a one-mile stroll. Or for true literary immersion, attend [Litquake](#), a yearly nine-day extravaganza that includes hundreds of author readings and a Lit Crawl through the Mission District.

## Chicago, Illinois



Photo © The American Writers Museum.

Chicago has a must-visit site for book lovers: the first and only museum in the U.S. dedicated to the written word. The [American Writers Museum](#) explores the country's literacy legacy through dynamic, interactive exhibits. One is a "surprise bookshelf" that reveals facts about legendary works through features like audio, video, and hidden windows. At the [Newberry](#), a c. 1887 library featured in Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveler's Wife*, see an exhibit, attend a workshop or author reading, or simply admire the architecture. To delve into the story behind another bestseller, *The Devil in the White City* by Erik Larson, climb aboard a bus tour given by [Weird Chicago](#). Have more time? Venture to the [Ernest Hemingway Birthplace Museum](#) in a Chicago suburb, or shop till you drop at the city's plethora of bookstores. And you might want to time your visit with the *Chicago Tribune* [Printers Row Lit Fest](#). Held annually in June, it's the largest free outdoor literary event in the Midwest.

## Key West, Florida

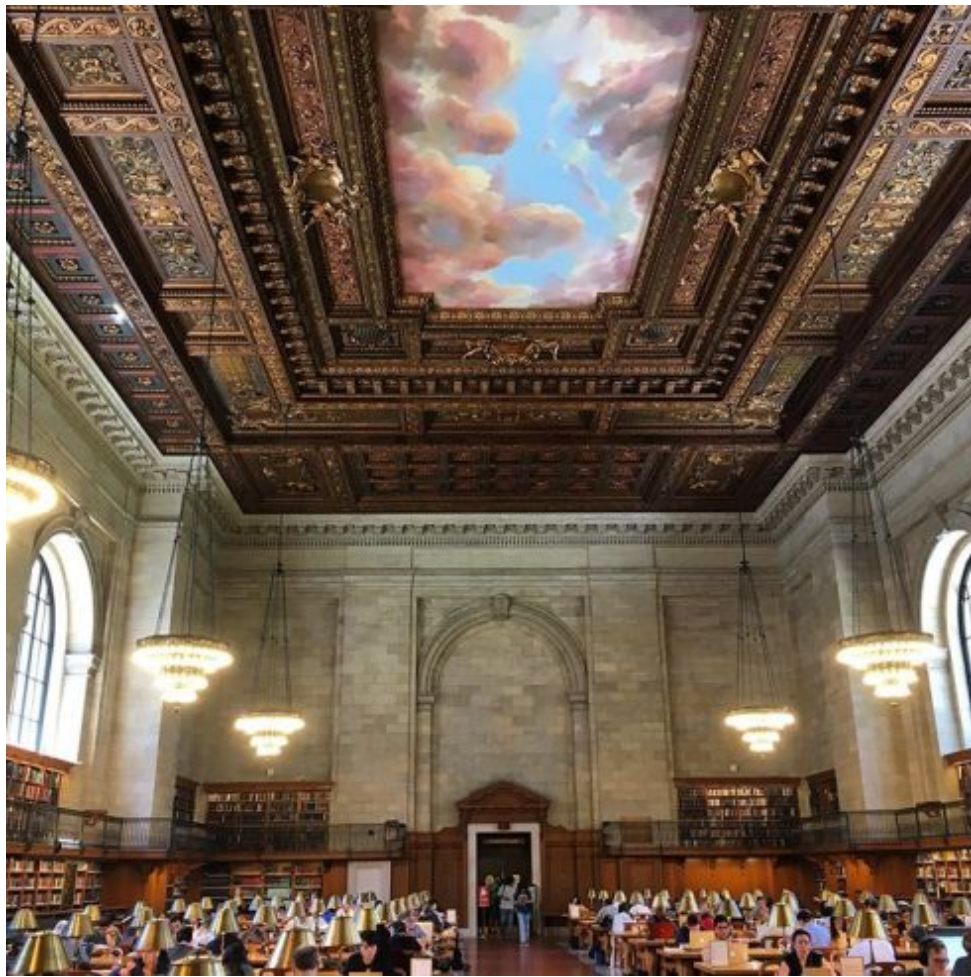




The Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum. Photo © Novel Destinations.

A brief stopover in this tropical city in 1928 turned into a years-long stay for Ernest Hemingway. Quirky, cultural Key West has lured other writers, too, like poets Robert Frost and Elizabeth Bishop and playwright Tennessee Williams, who is credited with inspiring the nightly sunset celebration in Mallory Square by toasting it with a gin and tonic. Today literary travelers can tour the [Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum](#) (six-toed cats are in residence), take a look at the tiny yet intriguing [Tennessee Williams Museum](#), join the [Old Town Literary Walking Tour](#), and browse or buy at [Books and Books at The Studios](#), co-owned by novelist Judy Blume. It's almost always cocktail hour in Key West, so stop by [Sloppy Joe's](#) for a Papa Doble, Hemingway's favorite. And if you're up for some Hemingway-style adventure, head by boat or seaplane to [Fort Jefferson](#) in the Dry Tortugas, where rough seas once stranded the writer and a band of fishing buddies for seventeen days.

## New York City

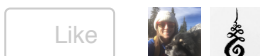


The Main Rose Reading Room at the New York Public Library, 42nd Street & Fifth Avenue. Photo © Novel Destinations.

Glamorous and gritty, dynamic and diverse, New York City has long attracted writers of all types, many of whom immortalized the city in print. Seek out locales mentioned in a favorite novel, perhaps *The Catcher in the Rye* or Edith Wharton's *Gilded Age* fiction. A top-notch outing is the [Greenwich Village Literary Pub Crawl](#), a booze- and gossip-fueled foray through the legendary neighborhood where Edgar Allan Poe (his [cottage](#) is in the Bronx), Jack Kerouac, Henry Miller, and other writers lived, wrote, drank, and brawled. Further uptown, E.L. Doctorow worked in the chandelier- and mural-bedecked reading room at the [New York Public Library](#)'s main branch. For pivotal scenes in *Ragtime*, Doctorow chose as a setting the nearby [Morgan Library and Museum](#). Financier J.P. Morgan's private library is a sight to behold. Three levels of bookshelves are surrounded by gilding, tapestries, paintings, and stained glass. Last but not least, stop at one of the city's terrific bookstores, like [The Strand](#), a treasure trove that's home to 18 miles of new, used, and rare books.

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