

Why All Movie Lovers Need to Visit Alamo Drafthouse

Posted on [31 July, 2016](#) by [Lisa Tate](#) • [0 Comments](#)



Limited edition pint glasses, movie books and other geeky collectibles are only part of reason so many movie geeks love the Alamo Drafthouse experience.

Image by Lisa Kay Tate

This spring, my hometown of El Paso became one of the most recent communities to claim an [Alamo Drafthouse Cinema](#) of its own.

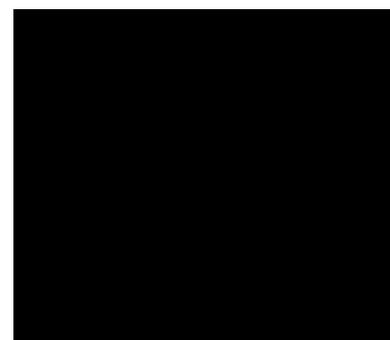
We aren't the only one, as Alamo Drafthouses have been dropping into communities nationwide, with their latest and biggest location [coming soon to Springfield, MO](#).

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Alamo Drafthouse was created in Austin, Texas in 1997 by movie lover Tim League and his wife as a place where movie lovers could enjoy new and classic movies, food, and breweries. Guests could also take part in special presentations and events celebrating the art of cinema sans disruptive elements like loud talking or the glare from cell phones.

This is all well and good on paper, but it seems more and more theatre chains have been upping their menu choices with a bistro-like experience, as well as adding movie clubs and classic movie series. I wanted to see for myself what Alamo Drafthouse had to offer that would give it an edge over the others. Short answer: a bunch!

I was able to enjoy a hard-hat tour of operations before it opened, and I was pretty impressed with what I saw, primarily with the dedication to the “old school” movie experience. Placed prominently among the line of the latest HD projectors was a 35mm projector for movie fans to see horror, action, and comedy classics in their original form.

In addition, none of the theatres were too large, and the front row of each theatre was set a good distance from the screen. This was to both avoid anyone having get stuck looking straight up at a screen, as well as to allow space for additional



Alamo Drafthouse's “old school” 35mm projection system. Image: Lisa Kay Tate.

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activities from movie talks and live entertainment to the occasional audience participation event.

However, it wasn't until several weeks later, when I treated my teen daughter and a couple of her friends to screening of *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, I realized the Drafthouse experience is really tailor-made for extreme movie lovers, as well as geeky parents want to turn a movie night into an even more immersive experience. Here are a few reasons:



Classic Mexican cinema and Dia de los Muertos inspired decor gives El Paso's Alamo Drafthouse its own border regional feel. Images: Lisa Kay Tate

They embrace the culture of their community. Every Alamo Drafthouse has a regional flair, unlike the cookie-cutter design of some large cinema chains.

El Paso's building features vintage movie posters from Mexican cinema and some fantastic Dia de Los Muertos artwork in the taproom.



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They also try to incorporate some local flavor into their special events and movie premieres. One recent event includes an appearance by NWA World Heavyweight legend Blue Demon Jr. (the son of the Blue Demon for luchador novices) for a recent documentary screening on Mexican-style wrestling, *Lucha Mexico*. They tapped out the evening by offering first 60 attendees (of legal age, of course) a custom pint glass and free pour of “Neato Bandito” beer from the Deep Ellum Brewing Co.

They also help give back to their community. Their summer Kids Club screenings, open to all ages, give all ticket proceeds to local nonprofits and schools. Ticket prices also range from \$1 to \$3, depending on what the ticketholder wants to pay.

They take movie food to a new level. Here’s how it works.

All seats are reserved, and doors open 30 minutes before each showing. Instead of commercial and regular previews, the screen shows “curated content” specific to each movie. Our *Alice* experience included an original silent short film and a look at Mad Hatters in movie history.

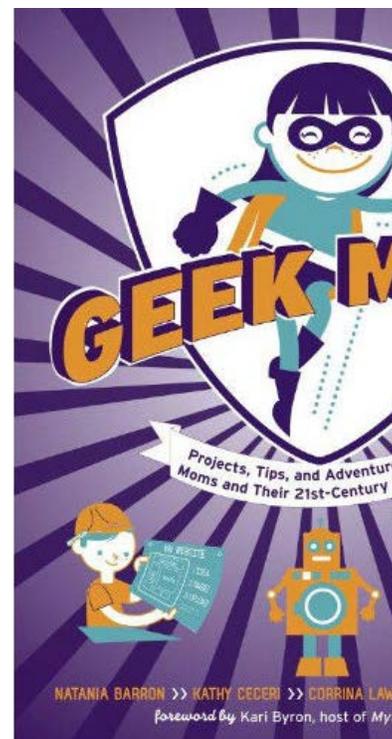
Each seat has its own table and a little ticket card, menu, and small reading light underneath the table top. Write down your order and place it in a slot in front of you with your theatre seat and row number. The stealthy serve comes sneaking in like a ninja Igor in the lab and takes your card. They quietly return with your meal, and if you need something else during the film, place another little card up. This can be anything from unlimited popcorn refills to full meals.

The menus also dress up a little bit to celebrate new releases. July menus’ items included meals for films like the *Ghostbusters* reboot with ectoplasm salsa. *Star Trek Beyond* got its own “Captain’s Dog” and mixed drinks based on actual drinks mentioned in the various *Star Trek* series like “Samaritan Sunset” and “Finagle’s Folly.”

Locally, our menu highlights Hatch green chile items, and their revamped kids menu includes some pretty healthy choices.

Most entrees run around \$10 to \$12, with kids meals from \$4 to \$7, but the best thing we enjoyed at our outing was the shakes. Those are a splurge item at about \$6 a pop (\$7 to \$8 for adult shakes), but they are worth it. We tried espresso chocolate and salted caramel shakes, but the balsamic strawberry was also tempting.

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Considering how much regular movie fare is, I figure it's worth it to get something a little more substantial brought straight to your seat.

Oh, for those wondering, the cheeseburger is called "Royale with Cheese."



From their menus to their memberships, Alamo Drafthouse celebrates the classic moviegoing experience. Image: Lisa Kay Tate

They aren't afraid to be the "Bad Guy" (for the right reasons). Alamo Drafthouse made some national news when a nasty profanity-and-bad-grammar-laden-voicemail rant from a one-time patron was turned into a promo for not texting during the film. [The hilarious result went viral.](#)

Anyone going to an Alamo Drafthouse should be aware that there is a zero-tolerance policy for cell phone use and loud yakking during the film. Guests will get one courtesy warning, but staff will boot them out of the theatre if they keep it up. No refunds for these unfortunate souls, either. This includes using your cell phone as a flashlight (remember the little menu lights under the table are there for a reason).

It isn't as if they don't warn guests beforehand. There are signs about not texting or talking, [promos featuring celebrity guests](#), and their long-time reputation for enforcing this rule.

Fair warning. Guests can also use those little menu cards to alert the staff if an audience member near them is being unruly.

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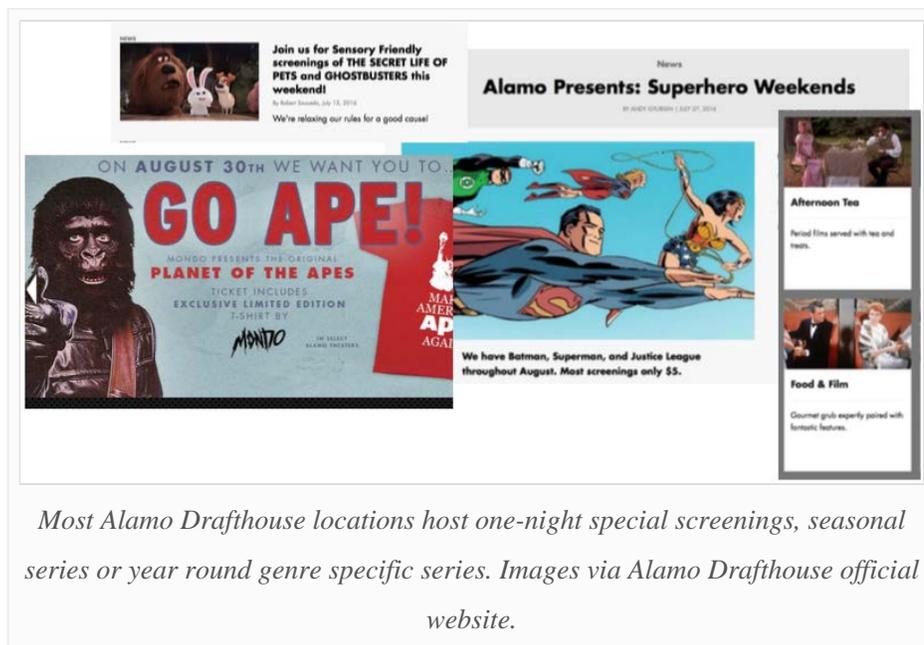
What about families with kids? Well, Alamo Drafthouse is family-friendly, but the emphasis is on family. No kids or teens under 18 are allowed without parent or adults, and most films admit age 6 and older only. Babies and younger toddlers are only allowed when specified, but there are often all ages and “sensory friendly” screenings offered, especially during the summer season. The talking rules are reasonably relaxed during these screenings.

For most screenings, however, people are there to see the movie. This means laugh, react to the film, and enjoy yourself, but leave the conversation about last night’s party until after the show.

You don’t have to go to the movies to have fun there. True to its name, Alamo Drafthouse is a “drafthouse.” Our location had its own full-service bar and restaurant, which has a nice enough atmosphere to enjoy on its own. Local and regional draft beers and coffee roasters are highlighted at each city as another way to work with the community. Our local Drafthouse’s Glass Half Full taproom even has a great sunset patio view.

On Tuesdays, the local taproom works with the [Geeks Who Drink Pub Quiz](#) group to host themed pub quiz nights. The themes themselves are pretty inventive such as “cheesy films with hammy actors” and “Cold as Ice.” This makes for a great geeky date night, without spending too much money.

They will, on occasion, post family-style quizzes, encouraging families to team up on themes like animated films or Disney, so all ages can get in on the fun.



The screenshot displays a website layout with several promotional elements. At the top left, there's a banner for "Sensory Friendly screenings of THE SECRET LIFE OF PETS and GHOSTBUSTERS this weekend!" with a date of "16-18th October, 2016" and the text "We're relaxing our rules for a good cause!". To the right, a "News" section features "Alamo Presents: Superhero Weekends" by Andy Sturken, dated July 27, 2016. Below these are three main content blocks: a large "GO APE!" poster for "Planet of the Apes" (dated August 30th) with a "MAY AMER AP AGAI" sticker; a "Superhero Weekends" graphic featuring Batman, Superman, and Justice League; and a sidebar with "Afternoon Tea" (period films with tea) and "Food & Film" (gourmet grub with thematic features).

Most Alamo Drafthouse locations host one-night special screenings, seasonal series or year round genre specific series. Images via Alamo Drafthouse official website.

It’s like attending a little mini comic or movie convention. All the fun and

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cheesiness of classic film actors, cosplay or audience participation experiences, and pop culture collectibles is offered year-round, but in smaller, less expensive doses.

The special screenings and genre specific series are a constant, in addition to their regular first-run films.

There have been Totally '80s or Ultimate '90s movies sing-a-longs, quote-alongs to films like *Superbad*, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, and *Coming to America*, a Kanye West glow-in-the-dark sing-along, a screening of *Friday the 13th* with an appearance by the “first Jason,” Ari Lehman, and a showing of *Hook* with appearances by “lost boys” Dante Basco (Rufio) and James Madio (Don't Ask). And this is just in the past couple of months.

Many of their screenings come with the opportunity to purchase limited edition pint glasses, movie books, t-shirts, and other items for sale by Austin-based design group [Mondo](#). Since opening in El Paso, swag collectors have already been able to amass items for *Batman vs. Superman*, *Captain America: Civil War*, *Finding Dory*, *Suicide Squad*, *Star Trek Beyond*, and more.

In select locations, an end-of-summer showing of the original 1968 sci-fi classic *Planet of the Apes* is planned complete with a limited edition “Make America Ape Again” t-shirt with ticket purchase. There will be specially-designed enamel pins and an event-exclusive black-and-tan vinyl pressing of the motion picture soundtrack for sale before and after the show.

There are also the popular Signature Series, ranging from “Afternoon Tea” period films accompanied by a tea and treats to “Tough Guy Cinema” action films or “Mondo and Chiller Presents,” a look at horror movie milestones over the past six decades.

In addition to all these things, Alamo Drafthouse has its own free [Alamo Victory rewards program](#) where regulars can earn free movie tickets, food and drink, and receive regular invitations to exclusive events.

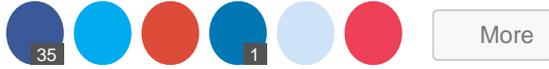
There's also a [Victory Vanguard](#) program for ages 15-17, which includes \$5 tickets to select screenings, and, the best part for teens, “no parents required” to attend these showings.

It's been awhile since the moviegoing experience for us has been more than just being able to watch a film on large-scale a few months before the world can watch it at home. Attending a screening at Alamo Drafthouse was more than just

watching a movie; it was experiencing a fully-immersive escape into another world where a night at the movies is something special.

A list of [Alamo Drafthouse locations](#), as well as upcoming sites, can be found on their website. Family-friendly offerings can also be found on their [Alamo Drafthouse Family](#) Facebook page.

Spread the word



Lisa Tate



Lisa Kay Tate is a veteran feature writer with 20 years experience in newspaper, magazine and freelance writing. In addition to serving as Associate Editor for her local arts and entertainment guide, El Paso Scene, she has been a regular contributor to the site [ihogeek.com](#) and maintains her own blogsite at [lisathegeekmom.wordpress.com](#). She and her husband, writer/photographer Rick, live on the edge of "New Texico" where they keep busy raising their two geeklings and sharing space with their dog, Sirius Black, and cat, Loki.

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