



Southern Belle

The best of Atlanta

The ATL, Hotlanta, A-town and The A are just a few of Atlanta's nicknames. Whatever you call it, this hot Southern city offers a variety of attractions, clubs and world-class cuisine to easily fill a weekend or more. Considered by many to be the hip-hop capital of the world, Atlanta might have you running into residents Ludacris, Big Boi or Young Jeezy. You're also likely to see a film crew hard at work, as the camera-ready city has emerged as an entertainment industry hot spot, home to Tyler Perry Productions, and featured in recent films like *Fast Five*. And of course, there are the housewives—"The Real Housewives of Atlanta," that is.

Instead of watching Atlanta on the silver screen, grab some girlfriends and head up, down or over for a girls' getaway. Whether it's sightseeing, dining, shopping or relaxing—we have you covered.

It All Begins Downtown

Until recently, there wasn't much to see in downtown Atlanta aside from skyscrapers and the State Capitol. Thanks to new developments centered around Centennial Olympic Park, that's changed. Located just steps from the park, the Georgia Aquarium (georgiaaquarium.org) and the highly caffeinated World of Coca-Cola (worldofcoca-cola.com) are two of Atlanta's largest attractions. At the World of Coke, you can explore the Atlanta drink's history and sample more than 60 international Coca-Cola products. The Georgia Aquarium boasts the world's largest aquarium exhibit, featuring whale sharks and manta rays, a 4D Theater, and a live theatrical show offered daily.

For a fun and fast-paced overview of the city's history and other downtown attractions, like Phillips Arena and the CNN Center, hop on a Segway and see it all in the course of a couple of hours. City Segway (citysegwaytours.com/atlanta) even offers an evening Legends and Lore tour that focuses on spooky sites and celebrity stories.

To take a look at the city's cultural history, head just two miles east of downtown to the Martin Luther King Jr. Historic Site (nps.gov/malu). You can take a tour of Dr. King's birthplace and visit Ebenezer Baptist Church, where he once preached. Sweet Auburn—Atlanta's historic black business district—is just a short walk away. The area is experiencing resurgence and new shops, bars and restaurants. Try lunch at Noni's Italian Deli (nonisdeli.com) or dinner at Café Circa (cafecircaatl.com), an upscale Caribbean-inspired restaurant. [+ more](#) ▶

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"Lenox Square offers nearly 250 specialty stores ranging from Gap to Louis Vuitton."

LEFT: South City Kitchen serves up delicious dishes
RIGHT: Friday nights are hopping at the Fernbank Museum of Natural History



Midtown Night Scene

Home to sprawling Piedmont Park and the High Museum of Art, Midtown Atlanta has blossomed in recent years as an arts and entertainment mecca. For a fun night out, try Southern cuisine at South City Kitchen (southcitykitchen.com/midtown). Afterward, the rest of the Crescent Avenue District, with its wide variety of bars and nightclubs, awaits you. High-powered Opera (operaatlanta.com), Sutra Lounge (sutraloungeatl.com) and Luxe Ultra Lounge (luxefultralounge.com) all offer DJ-driven dance beats.

A few blocks south, near iconic drive-in The Varsity (thevarsity.com), is the Apache Café (apachecafe.info). For great live jazz, hip-hop and spoken word, this small and intimate club is hard to beat. The performance venue, which also doubles as an art gallery and Caribbean-style restaurant, always seems to be on the cutting edge of what's new and hot in the music scene.

For something more low-key, try spending a night at the museum (with cocktails!). Fernbank Museum of Natural History (fernbankmuseum.org) offers Martinis & IMAX every Friday evening. Grab a cocktail, watch a film on the big

screen and dance to live music under the dinosaurs in the museum's large atrium.

Buckhead: Shopping and Pampering

You wouldn't want to leave Atlanta without bringing home a little something for yourself. Buckhead, the historically ritzy neighborhood just north of Midtown, is known for its primo shopping. Lenox Square offers nearly 250 specialty stores ranging from Gap to Louis Vuitton. Across the street is Phipps Plaza, which offers more upscale options. Bargain shoppers aren't left out in Buckhead, either. There are quite a few great consignment shops like bChic (bchicatlanta.com), where you can find designer fashions at a fraction of the cost.

Since being an out-of-towner can be stressful, a little pampering goes a long way. For the ultimate girls' getaway, stay at a hotel that offers spa services. The InterContinental Buckhead (ichotelsgroup.com) features some surprisingly low weekend rates, and it boasts a full-service spa, indoor pool and hot tub. Relax and say, "Ahhh." You've arrived.

+ by rachel roberts

it's festival time



ATLANTA JAZZ FESTIVAL

May 26-28

One of the largest jazz festivals in the country—and it's free. Located in historic Piedmont Park, it's a Memorial Day Weekend tradition. (atlantafestivals.com)

VIRGINIA HIGHLANDS SUMMERFEST

June 2-3

This annual festival highlights the shopping, dining and picturesque homes of the Virginia Highlands neighborhood. Features local artists, live music and more. (vahi.org/summerfest.html)

FOURTH OF JULY AT LENOX SQUARE

July 4

The world's largest 10K, the Peachtree Road Race, kicks off from here every 4th of July. Around 500,000 people usually turn out that evening to see the Southeast's largest fireworks extravaganza. (lenoxsquare.com)

NATIONAL BLACK ARTS FESTIVAL

Check website for dates

The only arts festival in the country devoted to African-American artistic achievement. In the past, it's consisted of a series of cultural events culminating in a street festival at Centennial Olympic Park. (nbaf.org)

GRANT PARK SUMMER SHADE FESTIVAL

August 25-26

Set in one of Atlanta's oldest and largest public parks, this festival features diverse arts and crafts, live music and, of course, plenty of street food. (gpconservancy.org)