

Plus! Trek Across the Sahara | What's New in Zurich | Barbados Picks | Road Trip Through the Past | Mongolian Odyssey



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Page 84 *When it Pays NOT to Plan Ahead!*

# TRAVELER

All travel, All the time  
March 2006 \$4.95

## Dreamland

28 Ways New Zealand Will Wow You

**Loire Châteaux**

Grand Living for Less

**Authentic India**

Finding the Real Deal

**Prime-Time Atlanta**

Heartbeat of the South

Smart Traveler  
**The New Passport**

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW  
Page 12

[nationalgeographic.com/traveler](http://nationalgeographic.com/traveler)

\$4.95US \$6.95CAN





# Atlanta High

With a showy new aquarium and art collections from the Louvre, Atlanta is on the rise. **By John Rosenthal**

**A**TLANTA IS AT IT AGAIN. Ever since Sherman reduced it to ashes in 1864, the city has had a burning need to rebuild. For years, that meant sprawling out to suburbs on the edge of infinity and beyond. But lately, Atlanta has begun to reinvent itself by filling in its once neglected center. A building boom in midtown started about five years ago; now it's downtown's turn. Around every corner some vacated factory or office building is being converted into luxury lofts or restaurants.

Until recently, this headlong reconstruction has been of interest primarily to residents, who are beginning to migrate back from suburbia. But that all changed last November with the splashy debut of the 290-million-dollar **Georgia Aquarium**, which promises to transform Atlanta into a bona fide tourist destination—a feat even the 1996 Olympics couldn't accomplish.

Visitors are discovering sophisticated restaurants and a music scene that defies easy categorization. "There isn't a genre that's not represented in this town—everything from hip-hop and

rap to folk, country, R&B, and rock," says Eddie Owen, founder of **Eddie's Attic**, a local venue that has launched singer-songwriters like Shawn Mullins and John Mayer. "And it's all in little rooms like ours that seat 150 people."

## »Don't Miss

An aquarium in Atlanta, 300 miles from the nearest ocean? "That's the best place," says Bernie Marcus, co-founder of Atlanta-based Home Depot and benefactor of the new Georgia Aquarium. "Many people here might never see the ocean, so this is a great opportunity. Plus we have fish that nobody in North America is going to see unless they have a lot of money and go on a worldwide ocean safari." The world's largest aquarium has leapfrogged to the top of Atlanta's list of attractions with a dazzling array of carefully re-created habitats for jellyfish, stingrays, hammerhead sharks, beluga whales, sea otters, spider crabs, reef squid, seahorses, and thousands of other sea creatures. The marquee stars are Ralph and Norton, two massive whale sharks that rule the main tank, but a personality-packed golden trevally named Sam is a shameless flirt who often steals the show.

The **High Museum of Art** has always been better known for its Richard Meier



Dining options range from the roasted duck chop at Two Urban Licks to sushi and pizza at the rooftop lounge of Shout (top) in midtown.

## 48 Hours

exterior (1983) than for its collection of decorative art. But a recent 177,000-square-foot Renzo Piano addition has doubled the museum's exhibition space and fueled grander ambitions. Beginning in October, those galleries will host works by Raphael, Rubens, and Rembrandt on loan from the Louvre in Paris, which has made the High Museum of Art its exclusive U.S. partner through 2009.

You won't meet Anderson Cooper on the **CNN Studio Tour**, but you will get a behind-the-scenes look at green-screen technology, which allows weathercasters to pinpoint thunderstorms on an invisible map. You'll also get a bird's-eye view of producers scurrying about the newsroom while an anchor reads the news for live broadcast.

For a unique Atlanta experience, join Sunday services (7:45 or 11 a.m.) at **Ebenezer Baptist Church's Horizon Sanctuary**, where every member of the congregation greets visitors with a handshake or a "holy hug." Across the street is Ebenezer's original **Heritage Sanctuary**, where Martin Luther King, Jr., moved a nation. In the nearby **National Park Service Visitors Center**, stirring video displays capture the power of Dr. King's oratory.

### »Shopping

For unique finds, head northeast from downtown to Virginia Highland where leafy streets are lined with stylish boutiques, neighborhood taverns, and sidewalk cafés. Stop in at **20th Century Antiques** for a marvelous selection of Eames-era furniture and accessories with a retro flair. You might find a glamorous Heywood Wakefield vanity, a gleaming chrome cocktail shaker, or a vintage dinette set from the 1950s. **Mitzi & Romano** is the place for

**At the Georgia Aquarium (right), a visitor gets an up-close view of the coral reef exhibit. Martin Luther King, Jr., (top) is honored with a metal sculpture.**



fashion-forward women's clothing including frilly blouses and cocktail dresses, cool designer jeans, and contemporary handbags.

Little Five Points, east of downtown, is a more eclectic hunting ground with a counterculture vibe. **Junkman's Daughter** is a gargantuan treasure trove of cheeky, silk-screen T-shirts, kitschy gifts, and pop culture relics like Fab Four lunch boxes. The knowledgeable staff at **Criminal Records** will help you negotiate an excellent selection of new music and independent releases. The store hosts frequent record-release events, with live performances in the parking lot on weekends.

Atlanta's gallery scene is as sprawling as the city itself. But that too is changing, says Anna Walker Skillman, photography dealer and owner of **Jackson Fine Art** in tony Buckhead, specializing in classics like Henri Cartier-Bresson, contemporary artists like Mona Kuhn, and local photographers like Angela West. Skillman urges gallery-hoppers to head to Castleberry Hills Arts District, a compact area just south of downtown, where dozens of studios showcase emerging artists. Skillman favors the **Skot Foreman Fine Art** for prints and



**Jessica Hubert greets visitors at the Belly General Store and restaurant in Virginia Highland.**

the **Marcia Wood Gallery** for contemporary paintings by artist Frances Barth. "The neighborhood is quickly becoming a serious arts district," Skillman says.

### »Where to Eat

The newest Atlanta dining trend is upscale restaurants in unusual spaces all over town. **Rathbun's**, occupying a converted stove factory in Inman Park, just east of downtown, is winning raves for excellent, reasonably priced New American dishes like tarragon-roasted chicken with Meyer lemon and mashed potatoes (dishes over \$25, such as Maine lobster in a roasted green chile soft taco are deemed "second-mortgage plates"). **Piebar**, located in a former midtown bank, attracts beautiful people who brave hour-long waits and a roaring din to nosh on delectable thin-crust pizzas with outlandish toppings. Rabbit with smoked Gouda, anyone?

On the other end of the spectrum is **Mary Mac's Tea Room**. This quiet parlor with genteel service is the place for southern hospitality and hearty fare like fried chicken, corn bread, and collard greens. The **Varsity** is another Atlanta institution, an old-fashioned drive-in complete with carhops. It's been serving hamburgers and hot dogs since 1928, to everyone from Elvis Presley to Bill Clinton. But the prize for Atlanta's best burger routinely goes to the 20

varieties (each a half-pound of choice beef) offered at the edgy **Vortex Bar and Grill**. In the Grant Park neighborhood,

**Ria's Bluebird**, near Oakland Cemetery, dishes out omelets, pancakes, and burritos all day, making it a terrific brunch

spot. The brisket breakfast, shredded beef and poached eggs in a spicy tomatillo broth, is a specialty.

### »Nightlife

At many Atlanta restaurants, the evening doesn't end with dessert. Live blues bands accompany slabs of ribs and pitchers of beer at **Fat Matt's Rib Shack**. At

cavernous, colorful **Loca Luna**, sizzling Latin music starts at sundown; it's *magnifico* for tapas and mojitos. **Blind Willie's** draws from blues traditions of Chicago, Memphis, and New Orleans, in both its music and menu. Francine Reed, a protégé of Lyle Lovett, plays here often.

**Après Diem**, a European-style café in a suburban-style midtown strip mall, is a local favorite for first dates and a good bet for a late bite, cappuccino, or nightcap. The **Park Tavern** brews its own beer and delivers knockout views of midtown's skyscrapers rising above Piedmont Park. **Krog Bar**, across from Rathbun's in Inman Park, is an intimate and sophisticated wine bar specializing in Mediterranean dishes, lively conversation, and vintages from Italy and Spain.

### »Lodgings

In a sea of chains catering to business travelers, the **Glenn** stands out as a self-consciously hip boutique hotel that's

nonetheless in walking distance from the convention center. The small but sleek rooms boast flat-screen TVs and Aeron chairs. The sexy **Bed** restaurant and lounge, imported straight from South Beach, invites you to party on your own four-poster. The 73-story **Westin Peachtree Plaza** is the tallest hotel in the Western Hemisphere, with stunning vistas from its revolving Sun Dial restaurant. A retractable domed roof makes the indoor/outdoor pool inviting in any season. The **Georgian Terrace Hotel** has been Atlanta's grande dame since 1911; it hosted the lavish 1939 premiere of *Gone With the Wind*. Next door is the **Hotel Indigo**, a moderately priced hotel decked out in wood floors and cool Caribbean colors, and only a mile from the High Museum of Art.

*Family visits and a quest for the world's best fried chicken have* **JOHN ROSENTHAL** *returning to Atlanta year after year.*



Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein's playful "House III" joins the High Museum's sculpture collection.

## Travel Planner

### »Phone Calls

The area code for Atlanta is 404.

### »Sightseeing, Culture, & Shopping

**20th Century Antiques** 1044 North Highland Ave.; 874-7042; [www.20thcenturyantiques.net](http://www.20thcenturyantiques.net).  
**CNN Studio Tour** 1 CNN Center (at Marietta St.); 827-2300; [www.cnn.com/studiotour](http://www.cnn.com/studiotour).  
**Criminal Records** 466 Moreland Ave.; 215-9511.

**Ebenezer Baptist Church Heritage Sanctuary and Horizon Sanctuary** 400 Auburn Ave. NE; 688-7263; [www.historicebenezer.org](http://www.historicebenezer.org).

**Georgia Aquarium** 225 Baker St.; 581-4000; [www.georgiaaquarium.org](http://www.georgiaaquarium.org).

**High Museum of Art** 1280 Peachtree St. NE; 733-4400; [www.high.org](http://www.high.org).

**Jackson Fine Art** 3115 E. Shadowlawn Ave.; 233-3739.

**Junkman's Daughter** 464 Moreland Ave. NE; 577-3188.

**Marcia Wood Gallery** 263 Walker St. SW; 827-0030.

**Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site** 450 Auburn Ave. 331-5190; [www.nps.gov/malu](http://www.nps.gov/malu).

**Mitzi & Romano** 1038 North Highland Ave. NE; 876-7228.

**Skot Foreman Fine Art** 315 Peters St. SW; 222-0440; [www.skotforeman.com](http://www.skotforeman.com).

### »Restaurants & Nightlife

**Après Diem** 931 Monroe Dr. NE; 872-3333.

**Belly General Store** 772 North Highland Ave. NE; 872-1003.

**Blind Willie's** 828 N. Highland Ave. NE; 873-2583; [www.blindwilliesblues.com](http://www.blindwilliesblues.com).



Blueberries rule at the Hotel Indigo.

**Eddie's Attic** 515-B North McDonough St.; Decatur; 377-4976; [www.eddiesattic.com](http://www.eddiesattic.com).

**Fat Matt's Rib Shack** 1811 Piedmont Ave. NE; 607-1622.

**Krog Bar** 112 Krog St. NE; 524-1618.

**Loca Luna** 836 Juniper St. NE; 875-4494.

**Mary Mac's Tea Room** 224 Ponce de Leon Ave.

NE; 876-1800; [www.marymacs.com](http://www.marymacs.com).

**Park Tavern** 500 10th St. NE; 249-0001; [www.parktavern.com](http://www.parktavern.com).

**Piebar** 2160 Monroe Dr.; 815-1605.

**Rathbun's** 112 Krog St. NE; 524-8280.

**Ria's Bluebird** 421 Memorial Dr.; 521-3737.

**Shout** 1197 Peachtree St. NE; 846-2000.

**Two Urban Licks** 820 Ralph McGill Blvd.;

522-4622; [www.twourbanlicks.com](http://www.twourbanlicks.com).

**Varsity** 61 North Ave. NW; 881-1706.

**Vortex Bar and Grill** 438 Moreland Ave. NE; 688-1828, or 878 Peachtree St. NE; 875-1667.

### »Lodgings

**Georgian Terrace Hotel** 659 Peachtree St. NE; 800-651-2316; [www.thegeorgianterrace.com](http://www.thegeorgianterrace.com). From \$129.

**The Glenn** 110 Marietta St. NW; 521-2250; [www.glennhotel.com](http://www.glennhotel.com). From \$189.

**Hotel Indigo** 683 Peachtree St. NE; 874-9200; [www.hotelindigo.com](http://www.hotelindigo.com). From \$134.

**Westin Peachtree Plaza** 210 Peachtree St.; 659-1400; [www.westin.com/peachtree](http://www.westin.com/peachtree). From \$310.