

NEIGHBORHOODS TO KNOW

Atlanta's options for shopping, eating and sleeping are vast, stretching across various neighborhoods, each with their own very distinct style.

By Giannina Smith



Virginia-Highland

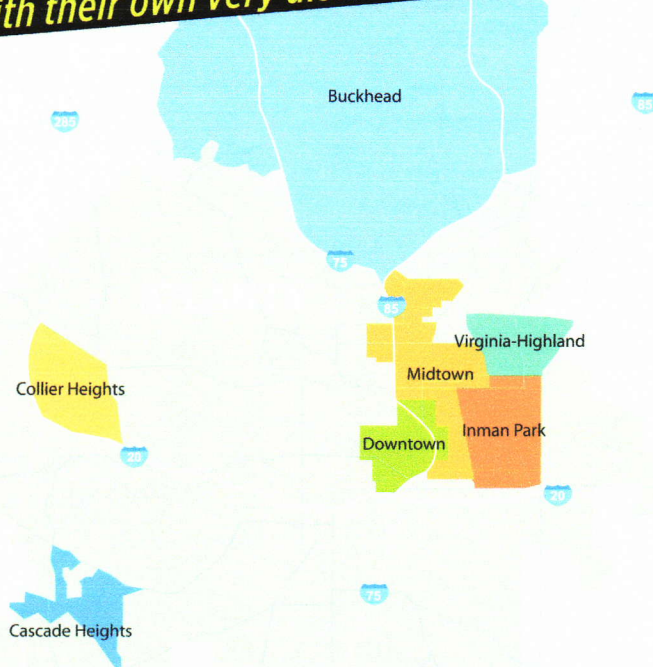
Residential charm and walkability make Virginia-Highland one of the most sought-after addresses in Atlanta. Developed in the early 1900s, the community is located northeast of downtown and centered at the corner of Virginia and Highland avenues, where the bulk of commercial development began in 1925. The "Highlands," as it is dubbed by locals, is dotted with small restaurants, bars and boutique shopping. Residential tree-lined streets intersect with bustling Highland Avenue and the scattered green spaces, benches and outdoor patios make enticing vantage points for people-watching. Stroll by **Fire Station No. 19**, built in 1924, or hang out in **John Howell Park**, named after the grass-roots civic activist, and watch the skilled sand volleyball players. This neighborhood has everything from trendy designer shops and hipster hair salons to classic woodworking stores and antiques stores, many housed in buildings dating back to the 1920s.

By day, dog walkers and parents with strollers amble through the streets; at night, young professionals and college students pack watering holes **Dark Horse Tavern & Grill** and **Atkins Park Restaurant**, which is reported to have the oldest liquor license in the city. A new addition to the restaurant scene is bistro **Goin' Coastal**, which serves sustainable Southern seafood. Tour of Homes each December is also not to be missed, offering the chance to take a peak into the neighborhood's historic bungalows and stately homes.

Cascade Heights

Southwest Atlanta's Cascade Heights, or as it is more commonly called "Cascade," is an affluent, predominantly black community that came together in the 1960s. Cascade boasts upscale shopping, sushi and soul food, but primarily it is a residential community famous for its beautiful landscape, lovely homes and historic churches. Many local notables call Cascade home, including current Atlanta mayor Kasim Reed, former UN ambassador and mayor Andrew Young, former Atlanta mayor Shirley Franklin, civil rights leader Joseph Lowery and the legendary Hank Aaron.

Here find some of the city's largest churches, including the grand **Cascade United Methodist Church**. Nearby, **Cascade Springs Nature Preserve**, site of the Battle of Utoy Creek when the Union army approached Atlanta, now has 120 acres of trails and wildlife, with some trenches still intact. Another historic site is the **Cascade Mansion and Gardens**. With antebellum-style architecture, stately white columns and elegant fountains, this two-acre spot draws people from all over the region for events in a setting with true Southern charm.



Buckhead

Buckhead is one of Atlanta's most affluent communities, with upscale shopping, dining and lodging in one central locale. For a glimpse of the governor's mansion and the homes of Buckhead's elite, drive down West Paces Ferry Road or visit the **Swan Coach House**, an Italian mansion built in 1928 and situated on the grounds of the Atlanta History Center.

Buckhead has undergone a recent revival, transforming into what some call "The Beverly Hills of the South." Forthcoming developments include a new shopping row that will mimic Rodeo Drive with designer boutiques and restaurants. Down Peachtree Road and Piedmont Road, landmark bridal boutiques and high-end condo towers abound and the business district entices high-profile companies with its well-appointed office towers. **Lenox Square** and **Phipps Plaza** are the shopping hubs of the community with Neiman Marcus and Nordstrom. Smaller, independently owned boutiques are scattered on Pharr Road and other side streets and in Shops Around Lenox and other retail areas. Eateries in the area cater to a well-heeled clientele, many whom frequent the same table every day. On the first floor of the Sovereign Building, **Bistro Niko** is notorious for both regional French comfort cuisine and a long wait; once in, diners take their time on the outdoor terrace overlooking Peachtree Road.



Georgia World Congress Center

Downtown

Downtown is the true nucleus of city, dating back to the 1830s. One of the neighborhood's most historic sites is the Zero Milepost, marking the southeastern terminus of the Western and Atlantic Railroad and symbolizing the settlement that eventually became Atlanta. Today, the post can be viewed with a visit to **Underground Atlanta**, an entertainment district built over the city's railroad tracks. Downtown is also the address of Georgia State University with its 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students who add their vibe to the neighborhood streets and restaurants.

Downtown is also home to some of the city's most noteworthy attractions. **The CNN Center**, **World of Coca-Cola** and the **Georgia Aquarium** are all within easy walking distance of one another. Nearby **Centennial Olympic Park** is 21-acre green space built for the 1996 Olympics. Stop by and visit "The Fountain of Rings" commemorating the games. Adjacent to the park, the **Georgia World Congress Center** hosts some of the city's biggest conventions, while the nearby Georgia Dome brings football fans from afar to cheer on the NFL's Atlanta Falcons. Down the street, Philips Arena showcases the NBA's Atlanta Hawks and NHL's Atlanta Thrashers. If you can't make the game, hit nearby **STATS**, an upscale sports bar featuring individual table taps so patrons can pour their own beer. For an amazing panoramic view of downtown, take the elevator up 73 stories to the top of the Westin Peachtree Plaza to the revolving Sun Dial Restaurant, Bar & View, 723 feet above the city. For a spot away from the city skyscrapers, visit **TWO** urban lofts, where patrons (including Oprah on occasion) pack the renovated-warehouse restaurant for live music and smoked-salmon chips.

Midtown

Sandwiched between Downtown and Buckhead, Midtown is home to the Georgia Institute of Technology, Turner Broadcasting and The Woodruff Arts Center, making it a bustling center of education, arts and business. The community's residential side combines historically upscale neighborhoods such as Ansley Park and newer condo towers and apartments in the mixed-use development of Atlantic Station that attract young professionals. Situated in the heart of Midtown's fine arts center, near the **High Museum of Art** is the Savannah College of Art and Design's Atlanta campus. Nearly 2,000 students reside in the college's state-of-the-art facilities, which include an art and design center and newly added digital media center. SCAD's artistic students contribute talent to the city's galleries and participated in the monumental \$2.2 million restoration of Ivy Hall, a mansion formerly known as the Peters House, now housing a cultural and writing center.



Piedmont Park

One of the best views of Midtown's skyline—showcasing 41-story 1180 Peachtree and also Atlanta's third-tallest building, One Atlantic Center—can be had from **Piedmont Park**, a 180-acre green space that recently underwent a \$66 million renovation. Popular for picnics and sports, Piedmont was the site of the 1895 World's Fair and continues to host historical events and concerts. It's also home to the newly expanded **Atlanta Botanical Garden** and its 600-foot Canopy Walk. The park marks the finish line for the Peachtree Road Race 10K and is the stomping grounds for the Dogwood Festival and PRIDE celebration. Farther south, landmarks include the historic Georgian Terrace Hotel situated across from the fabulous Fox Theatre, an ornate movie palace hosting Broadway productions and special events. Next door, Churchill Grounds is an old-school jazz club where talented musicians transport patrons to the days of Louis Armstrong and Miles Davis. For a down-home taste of Midtown and Georgia Tech college life, visit **The Varsity**—the world's largest drive-in restaurant—and indulge in a one of its famous hot dogs.

FESTIVAL FEVER

Atlanta's year-round festivals highlight the city's best art, music and food.

FEBRUARY

Atlanta Jewish Film Festival is the largest film festival in Atlanta and the second-largest Jewish film festival in the U.S. ajff.org

MAY

Sweet Auburn Springfest boasts seven stages and Atlanta's best gospel, jazz, blues and hip-hop greats, and it is hailed as one of the largest events of its kind in the Southeast. sweetauburn.com

Atlanta Food & Wine Festival is expecting 3,000 chefs, tastemakers and foodies when it makes its debut in 2011. atfoodandwinefestival.com

Atlanta Jazz Festival hosts more than 100 of the best jazz performers, culminating in Piedmont Park. atlantafestivals.com

SEPTEMBER

Yellow Daisy Festival at Stone Mountain Park is a craft show with open-air shopping, live entertainment and food. stonemountainpark.com

NOVEMBER

Cabbagetown Chop and Stomp incorporates individual and local restaurant entries in an annual chili cook-off event held along the streets of this old millworkers' community. The laid-back event also showcases live local bands. chompandstomp.com

APRIL

Atlanta Film Festival 365 incorporates screenings at multiple venues, showcasing more than 160 independent films from 17 countries. atlantafilmfestival.com

Atlanta Dogwood Festival celebrates spring and is one of the longest-running festivals in the city. More than 200 of the nation's top artists descend on Piedmont Park among the blooming dogwoods. dogwood.org

Inman Park Festival takes place in one of Atlanta's oldest neighborhoods. The festivities include a tour of homes and a parade. inmanparkfestival.org

JUNE

Virginia-Highland Summerfest kicks off with a 5K run and Tot Trot and continues with a mix of arts, food and local music. vahi.org/summerfest.html

JULY

National Black Arts Festival showcases the work of more than 1,000 artists from the Caribbean, Africa, Europe and the Americas. nbaf.org

OCTOBER

Taste of Atlanta offers food from more than 70 local restaurants and wines from around the world. Sample goodies from small local bakeries, big steak houses and everything in between. tasteofatlanta.net

PRIDE celebrates lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual individuals with more than 300,000 participants throughout the Southeast. atlantapride.org