



Here again is
Atlanta Magazine's
much-anticipated guide to
all the best our city has to
offer—in dining, shopping, arts,
entertainment, media, fitness
& beauty. As our city keeps
getting better, so does our annual
guide, now in its 26th year.

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Best of Atlanta



Readers love to party at Compound.

panini and salads, round out the menu. Be warned: The chatty crowd and live music on weekend evenings tend to raise the decibel level. If it's too loud inside, you can always grab an outdoor table on the patio.

BEST UNDERGROUND CLUB
MJQ Concourse

736 Ponce de Leon Ave.
404-870-0575

Both literally and figuratively, MJQ registers as noteworthy on Atlanta's underground club scene. It purposefully leaves out all the flash and pretentiousness that many of the city's popular nightspots project. Its greatest quality is that it's an off-the-beaten-path destination for folks who are more concerned with the party than their party clothes. Literally built underground, it manages to draw one of the most diverse crowds in the city. It's hard to figure out what's the bigger draw—the laid back, loungey atmosphere or the opportunity to watch two DJs in different parts of the club simultaneously spin-

ning everything from hip-hop to disco.

BEST PLACE TO HANG WITH THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

Halo

817 West Peachtree St.
404-962-7333

This hip Midtown lounge attracts a glamorous clientele. Located in the heart of Midtown's party district, it's a destination spot for a diverse mix of Atlanta's bold, beautiful and fashionable twenty- and thirty-somethings. There's usually no cover charge, though the drinks are pricey. But who cares if your apple martini costs \$10 when you can sample a great tapas menu and listen to DJs spinning everything from acid jazz to world music, all while gawking at a Brad Pitt look-alike?

BEST PLACE TO SALSA
Sanctuary Latin Nightclub

3209 Paces Ferry Place
404-262-1377

Whether you're a novice or a pro at salsa dancing, this nightspot lives up to its

claims as one of the city's "true Latin nightclubs." The DJ spins the hottest mix of salsa, merengue, bachata, cumbia and a little house music, and it's a destination for those serious about salsa. This spacious spot gives you the kind of room you need

to shake it to your heart's content. It's completely smoke-free, and offers a free weekend buffet and free salsa lessons for all skill levels on Fridays.

BEST WINE BAR

Vinocity

36 13th St.
404-870-8886

Owners Ian Smith, John Turpin and Jimmy Jones wanted to make wine-tasting a more approachable experience. They've done just that. Vinocity offers more than 60 different wines by the glass, with an emphasis on small boutique and new world vintners available in a variety of price ranges. There's a full dinner menu, but if you just want to curb your appetite while you focus on wines, order one of the delectable cheese trays and snag one of the cozy sitting areas in this quaint, converted house.



Tarrazu Coffee Bar

COMPOUND, TARRAZU COFFEE BAR, WATTIE HOUSE, DAEMON

Weekend evenings are popular, so get there early or you'll have to stand and sip.

BEST WEEKNIGHT

BAR SCENE

Twist

3500 Peachtree Road
404-869-1191

After a hard day at work, Atlanta's trendy, attractive and upwardly mobile faction unwinds at this restaurant/bar that's tucked in a corner of Phipps Plaza. With its dimly lit, ultra contemporary decor and "see and be seen" crowd, most evenings it looks more like a nightclub than a restaurant (though the food is good, too), and the nightly \$5 martini specials and the live music on weekend evenings keeps us coming back for more.

BEST PLACE TO HEAR

POETRY

Apache Café

64 Third St.
404-876-5436

When you step into this cozy spot tucked behind the Varsity in Midtown, you'll feel like you walked right into a scene from the movie *Love Jones*. This is where die-hard urban poetry fans come to listen to and perform original works. Check out the Free Forum Exchange, held Sunday evenings, for a sampling of some of the best spoken-word performances, poetry and live musical acts Atlanta has to offer. After one visit it'll be crystal clear how this place (formerly home of the Yin Yang Café) helped groom some of Atlanta's best talent, including India.Arie.

BEST GAY-FRIENDLY HANG-OUT FOR GROWN-UPS

The Red Chair

550-C Amsterdam Ave.
404-870-0532

If your Backstreet days were behind you even before it closed its doors, this popular restaurant/bar is the upscale alternative you've been looking for. The eclectic, gay-friendly bar and eatery boasts a full lunch and dinner menu. Not hungry? Grab a chair at the bar and sip a martini while six massive video screens play popular music videos all around you. It's a smoke-free environment indoors, but you're free to light up on the covered patio. There's also a gourmet Sunday brunch buffet. You won't want to miss karaoke night on Thursdays and the popular Red Chair Revue drag show (starring Bubba D. Licious) on Sundays.

BEST PLACE TO DO THE TEXAS TWO-STEP

Wild Bill's

2075 Market St., Duluth
678-473-1000

Enjoy a true boot-stompin' time while socializing with Atlanta's country music fans at this dance hall located in front of Gwinnett

Place Mall.

With live music, line dancing lessons and tons of hot waitresses, Wild

Bill's lives up to its name. Some of the biggest names in country music perform here, including Trace Adkins, Big & Rich and



Readers love Waffle House for late-night eating.

Brad Paisley. This place can pack up to 5,000 cowboy hat-clad folks at a time. Buying a Wild Card gets you special discounts on certain nights. Take the teens to family night, held most Sunday evenings.

BEST PLACE TO DANCE TO HIP-HOP

Vision Nightclub & Lounge

1068 Peachtree St.
404-874-4460

This is where you could literally bump into Atlanta rappers Lil' Jon and

Ludacris while you're bumping and grinding to their latest hits on the massive dance floor. After a million-dollar renovation two years ago, the club that was formerly Kaya has enjoyed a rebirth as an upscale and sophisticated destination. With 25,000 square feet of floor space, you should have more than enough room to Harlem Shuffle. Friday nights with V-103's Frank Ski spinning old school hip-hop is a "must" experience for die-hard hip-hop fans. ★



All photos
Harlem Bar

the concert circuit, but this quaint space, located on the upper level of Center Stage Atlanta, is favored by music lovers who appreciate great acoustics and an intimate setting in which to hear some of the hottest local and regional bands around.

BEST GAY CLUB

Jungle

2115 Faulkner Road, 404-844-8800,
jungleclub.net

An abundance of shirtless hotties proudly displaying their six-

packs on the massive dance floor is the main attraction at this jungle-themed sister club of the Red Chair Video Lounge.

BEST PLACE TO MIX IT UP

Après Diem

931 Monroe Drive, Suite C-103, 404-872-3333, apresdiem.com

In a city where club crowds tend to have a dominant hue (depending on the day of the week), it's refreshing to see blacks, whites, Indians, Latins, Asians, and just

about every other ethnic group fraternizing over cocktails, coffee, and light fare as a DJ provides an eclectic soundtrack.

BEST-KEPT SECRET

El Bar

939 Ponce de Leon Ave., 678-613-3807

Slip behind the unmarked door leading to this tiny, smoky enclave tucked beneath the El Azteca restaurant on Ponce. The intoxicating ambience is reminiscent of the original MJQ Concourse.

PHOTOS BY AUDRA MELTON

THURSDAY SPEAK EASY THURSDAYS

Leopard Lounge
84 12th St., 404-875-7562,
leopardlounge.biz

The hot hip-hop soundtrack, newly upgraded covered patio bar, and meat, ahem, meet-market atmosphere keep metro-area singles coming back each week to stalk more prey.

FRIDAY MARTINIS & IMAX

Fernbank Museum of
Natural History
767 Clifton Road, 404-929-6300, fernbank.edu

Soothing live jazz, marvelous martinis, multicultural cuisine, and, of course, the featured IMAX movie make this affair, presented every Friday evening (except in December), the perfect kickoff to the weekend.

SATURDAY OLD SCHOOL SATURDAY

Various intown locations
404-255-3319, oldschooolsaturday.com

This monthly event, held every second Saturday at upscale intown venues such as the Woodruff Arts Center and the Westin Peachtree Plaza hotel, delivers on its promise of "All old school music. All night." This trip down musical memory lane encompasses R&B, hip-hop, house, reggae, and even a little go-go.

SUNDAY SUNDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL

300 Atlanta
2175 Savoy Drive, 770-451-8605, 3hundredatlanta.com

To bowl or not to bowl will be the only dilemma at this entertainment complex, which lives up to its billing as a "nightlife experience." Watch the big game on the giant screen, shake your groove thing as the DJ spins during commercial breaks, and whether you bowl or not, you're sure to have a ball!



BEST MAKEOVER**Wish**

447 Moreland Ave., 404-880-0402,
wishatl.com

It took two-and-a-half years of planning, nine months of construction, and two New York designers to redo the former library that houses Wish—and it was worth the wait. This destination for hipsters carries edgy clothing and an underground lair of sneakers from hard-to-find and limited-edition lines such as MadFoot and Alife.

BEST EXTRA BAGGAGE**Kaleidoscope Boutique
featuring 4Bags**

252 West Ponce de Leon Ave., Decatur,
404-378-1214, kscopeboutique.com

Joining forces with 4Bags—purveyor of the arm candy a woman cares about, fab handbags—Kaleidoscope proved that growth does wonders. A fun attitude reigns as do labels such as House of Dereon (the line by Beyoncé and Tina Knowles) and a slew of designer denim.

**BEST CASUAL CLASSICS****Theory**

Phipps Plaza, 404-869-8791, theory.com

Cream. Khaki. Gray. Sound boring? In theory, yes. But in Theory, not in the least. This new Phipps boutique adds pop to classics with fresh details such as a shrugged collar on a blouse or three-quarter sleeves on a cropped velvet coat.

BEST DRESSY CLASSICS**Neiman Marcus**

Lenox Square, 404-266-8200,
neimanmarcus.com

When an occasion calls for a timeless piece that can be counted upon for years to come, Neiman Marcus delivers. The department store's expansion (to be completed in fall of 2007) stands to add 51,000 square feet of extra space for styles from designers who never disappoint a woman looking for a classic.

BEST HOT MAMA HAVEN**Tory Burch**

Phipps Plaza, 404-816-3261,
toryburch.com

A mother of six, Tory Burch understands a multitasker's needs, and her bold patterned designs go from the playground to a client meeting to a dinner date with ease.

BEST MEN'S CONTEMPORARY CLOTHING**BOSS Hugo Boss**

Phipps Plaza, 404-846-6066,
hugoboss.com

The precisely folded polos, meticulously aligned ties, and wall of bright button-downs will make shoppers feel like kids in a couture candy shop. The tailored suits, bold accessories, and cool casuals let any man see the fun in fashion.

BEST DATE-NIGHT OUTFITS**Intermix**

Phipps Plaza, 404-846-8446,
intermixonline.com

Like your best friends before a big night out, the staff at Intermix

Best of Lithonia

**BEST DATE-NIGHT RESTAURANT
ARIZONA'S STEAKS, CHOPS
& SEAFOOD**

2940 Stonecrest Circle,
678-526-7775

With an extensive menu that includes fall-off-the-bone, knife-and-fork baby back ribs and a Granny Smith apple salad with made-from-scratch port wine dressing; a fully stocked bar that offers more than 100 wines and an eclectic mix of martinis; upscale Southwestern decor that features both a cascading waterfall and a cozy fireplace; and live jazz performances most nights, showcasing heavy-hitters such as violinist Ken Ford, it's no wonder this Stonecrest-area restaurant is a local favorite.

**BEST COMFORT-FOOD FIX
GLADYS KNIGHT & RON WINAN'S
CHICKEN & WAFFLES**

7301 Stonecrest Concourse,
Suite 123, 770-482-6766,
gladysandron.com

No need to endure the ridiculous wait at the original Peachtree Street destination when you can come here to enjoy the same flaky fried chicken, piping-hot made-to-order waffles, signature "Uptown" (a mix of sweet tea and lemonade), and authentic Southern sides like collard greens, mac 'n' cheese, and yams.

**BEST PAMPERING
DE'AMAR SALON & SPA**

7300 Stonecrest Concourse,
Suite 106, 770-482-1200,
deamarsalonandspa.com

One whiff of the intoxicating rosemary-peppermint scent



wafting through this full-service spa, which includes an Aveda retail store and hair salon, and you'll understand why its name means "of love."

**BEST DRESSED
PHOEBE'S BOUTIQUE**

8120 Mall Parkway, Suite 440,
770-484-3737

Whether you're looking for that perfect cocktail party dress or the right ensemble for your niece's wedding, this high-end women's boutique, now located near Stonecrest after moving from Wesley Chapel, provides stylish options with a great purse and earrings to match!

**BEST NATURE HIKE
DAVIDSON-ARABIA NATURE
PRESERVE**

3787 Klondike Road, 770-484-3060, arabiaalliance.org

Sprawling farmland, breathtaking wildflowers, and lush greenery surround the 15-mile trail that winds through 2,000 acres of protected land in South DeKalb—the largest expanse of county parkland in metro Atlanta—and will make you forget you're hiking, skating, or biking your way to better health. The final portion, completed last summer, features long boardwalks over lowland marshes, a covered bridge over Stephenson Creek, wildlife overlooks, and a rocky outcrop.

**BEST SINGLES SCENE
C'EST BON**

2853 Panola Road, 770-323-4242, cestbononline.com

The New Orleans mantra "laissez les bon temps roulez" lives on at this Big Easy-themed eatery. Frozen drinks, such as the Dauphine Daiquiri, and live music at the bar make this a hot spot for area singles.

**BEST CONCERT VENUE
STEWART AMPHITHEATER**

251 Park Drive, 770-484-2515

Who needs Chastain? This 2,500-seat amphitheater, located in the heart of historic downtown Lithonia, offers an intimate environment where you can buy or bring your own candlelight dinner.



Theory

is there to reassure. "You look great," they exclaim; "That's really hot," they declare. And you know what? It's hard *not* to look terrific in these trendy, ready-to-wear pieces straight from the runway.

BEST FASHION MERGER

Jeffrey Atlanta

Phipps Plaza, 404-237-9000,
jeffreayatlanta.com

When his royal vogueness, Jeffrey Kalinsky, knocked down the walls between his namesake boutique and his other enterprises—Jil Sander and Bob Ellis—he created a snow-white, 9,000-square-foot amalgam of style with both classic and edgy labels, including Nina Ricci and YSL.

BEST ROCKER FASHIONS

Metropark

Perimeter, 770-390-9226; Lenox Square,
404-846-6054, metroparkusa.com

Metropark outfits cool kids who swear they don't care what they look like—but really do. Expect a "Seven Nation Army" to march out in labels such as Soul Rebel and Gwen Stefani's Harajuku Lovers.

BEST CLOTHING WITH A CONSCIENCE

Eco-Bella

1046 North Highland Ave., 404-815-4280, eco-bella.com

Atlanta's first all-organic boutique carries adult yoga-wear and lots of comfy, 100 percent organic clothing for kids. Linens and milk-based paints are also available.

BEST HIPSTER TEES

Alternative

776 North Highland Ave., 404-249-8302, alternativeapparel.com

When you step into the latest Bill Hallman boutique and hear soulful sounds from the likes of Stevie Wonder or Bill Withers, you feel the funk. You feel cool. But most importantly, you have *got* to feel the T-shirts, hoodies, and thermals. The richly hued, modern-cut pieces feel as soft as cloud nine.

BEST ALL-PURPOSE TEES

American Apparel

Multiple locations, including Lenox Square,
404-812-0010, americanapparel.net

Few regular folk dare to sport the oh-so-short shorts flaunted by the lithe sales clerks. But for the upper body, nothing beats the logo-free cotton tees, made by an enterprise that bills itself as 100 percent "sweatshop free."

BEST DESIGNER DESTINATION

Phipps Plaza

3500 Peachtree Road, 404-261-7910,
simon.com

Barneys New York CO-OP, Jimmy Choo, Armani, Gucci, Tiffany, Tory Burch, and Elie Tahari, all in the stretch between Nordstrom and Saks. Don't forget a credit card—preferably platinum.

Best of Marietta



BEST BAKERY

GABRIEL'S DESSERTS

688 Whitlock Ave.,
Suite 3-B, 770-427-9007,
gabrielsdesserts.com

Heir to the recipes of Marietta's famous "Cake Lady," Mary Moon, John-

nie Gabriel has been attracting customers from all over the metro area for 10 years. Our favorites are the to-die-for layer cakes like fresh strawberry and "The White Lady" (fudge with white chocolate mousse).

BEST FRENCH TWIST

C'EST MOI
1100 Johnson Ferry Road,
770-977-8468

The elegant gifts and home accessories are more Francophile in spirit than French in origin. But an expansion made the space feel like a Left Bank atelier and the adjoining Cafe de Paris cozier than ever.

BEST GIRLY GIRL ACCESSORIES

THE FUNKEY MONKEY
1320 Johnson Ferry Road,
770-578-6200, thefunkey-monkey.com

Affordable handbags and jewelry are a godsend for teens and the young-at-heart who want to look beyond the mall.

BEST DRAMATIC FLAIR

THEATRE IN THE SQUARE
11 Whitlock Ave.,
770-442-8369, theatrein-the-square.com

Whether tackling stage classics (*A Raisin in the Sun*) or newer material (*Turned Furry*), this company has won the

respect of regional theater critics and the loyalty of the community.

BEST STEAKHOUSE

ASPENS SIGNATURE STEAKS
2942 Shallowford Road,
678-236-1400;
The Avenue West Cobb,
3625 Dallas Highway,
770-419-1744

The clubby ambience, quality dishes, and professional service are a welcome change of pace from ubiquitous suburban chains.

BEST SPECIAL DELIVERY

CCBERRIES
2200 Roswell Road, Suite
130, 770-509-0280,

cberries.com

This tiny Marietta-based business delivers its yummy chocolate-covered cherries, strawberries, and raspberries nationwide—a stylish alternative to balloon bouquets or cookies.

BEST NEW LUNCH SPOT

CANVAS
724 Cherokee St.,
678-213-2268

Located across from WellStar Kennestone Hospital, this loft-like cafe exceeds business lunch status with its yummy paninis, gourmet sandwiches, vegetarian options, and decadent desserts. Closed Sundays.

THEORY PHOTOGRAPH: LAUREN RUBINSTEIN; CAKE PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF GABRIEL'S