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URBAN SPACES

Cities for the Ages

THE WORLD'S GREAT CITIES have a scope and complexity that vault them into leagues beyond their neighbors. They offer a unique bundling of culture, creativity, tradition, opportunity, surprise, glamour—all the things that stimulate and enrich us. Even as they pay homage to their history, they foster an energizing synergy that continually reinvents the urban landscape. Their contributions to global culture are essential to our collective consciousness. And what better city to visit with than ancient Athens, that classic Greek *metro polis*, or “mother city”?



INSIDE

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Atlanta? Absolutely!

Young and restless, Georgia's largest city retains the charm and verve of a spirited adolescent.

BY LYNNA WILLIAMS

The past lies everywhere in **Atlanta**, especially in historic Oakland Cemetery, a peaceful place of mausoleums and Confederate graves that dates to 1850. The city it rests in, founded in 1837, predates it by only 13 years.

Yet Atlanta is much more than its storied past, evident in the glass-and-steel skyline that shimmers on the horizon. This city, with its penchant for slogans, its roving eye for the next big thing, seems always to have known that the future is right now. Atlanta rebuilt itself in the 1870s after the devastation of the Civil War, and took on the moniker "Capital of the New South." A century later it became "The Next Great International City." Both are true today. The metropolitan area's five million residents may poke fun at their hometown's eternal love affair with its own bright future, but when the dogwood trees bloom, all that matters is the answer, "Yes," to the classic Atlanta question: "Beautiful day, isn't it?"

It is a beautiful city, too, with lovingly tended landscapes, where a particularly fetching stand of daffodils slows traffic on Highland Street in the Virginia-Highlands neighborhood. In Piedmont

Park's 186 acres, everyone comes out to play among the flowering azaleas.

Passionate debates on the best eateries are fundamental to the city's psyche. So are sunshine and college football. But fittingly for a place that aims to please, Atlanta is what you make of it. The heart of one man's Atlanta will be Turner Field, where a second World Series win is always just 162 games away. For another it's the neighborhood of Buckhead, flashy and ambitious, like a quarterback, but elegant too, with a record of making things happen.

Come to Atlanta in search of the past-as-prologue, and find it tucked into the modern city, amid the "anchors" of Atlanta's recent revitalization: the state-of-the-art Georgia Aquarium and the World of Coca-Cola, where everyone quaffs the city's trademark beverage like fine wine. Then return to Oakland Cemetery, where visitors leave golf mementos on the grave of Atlanta native and golfing champion Bobby Jones. Great American cities, after all, are great narratives, too.

Lynna Williams, a fiction writer and associate professor of English/Creative Writing at Emory University, has lived in Atlanta for two decades.



Gracious homes line Atlanta's Midtown. Buttermilk fried chicken (inset) is a highlight at South City Kitchen.

VITAL STATS Location:

Northwestern Georgia

• **Size:** 131 square miles (city), 8,480 square miles (metropolis)

• **Population:** 538,000 (city), 5,200,000 (metropolis)

• **Founded:** 1837

• **Notable:** Atlanta began as a railhead and was originally named Terminus; it enjoys the highest altitude of any major city east of the Mississippi River; Martin Luther King, Jr., was born in Atlanta; Coca-Cola was first sold in Atlanta's Jacob's Pharmacy, in 1886; Atlanta is the sole major U.S. city destroyed by fire as an act of war, when Union General William Tecumseh Sherman had it burned during the Civil War.

