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APG Blog

"Classic" Athens Blends Campus Life, Indie Music



Photo Credit: [Georgia Theatre](#)

Athens, Georgia, the historic Southern city with a hip college town vibe, blends the traditional amenities of a world-class learning center with the cutting-edge energy of a major cultural center.

Nestled some 70 miles north of Atlanta in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Athens is an energetic blend of old and new. Victorian-era buildings line historic downtown streets teaming with funky shops, contemporary art galleries, classic record stores, progressive culinary experiences and eclectic nightlife.

Athens is best known as the home of the University of Georgia, chartered in 1785 as America's first state college. Athens itself was founded in 1806, drawing its name from the ancient Greek center of higher learning. The city is nicknamed the "Classic City" – a reference to both its namesake in Greece and the style of architecture found in its many historic homes. But Athens is also known to international music lovers as the "Liverpool of the South" for its role as a global center of independent music and the birthplace of New Wave music.

More Than Just a "College Town"

Athens is home to the sprawling 793-acre main campus of the University of Georgia (UGA), the flagship of the state higher education system. For the fall 2012 quarter, UGA had more than 26,200 undergraduate and 8,000 graduate students enrolled at the main campus in Athens plus four other campuses. More than 1,500 of that number were international students.

UGA has the most comprehensive variety of courses in the state, with schools and colleges focusing on medicine; law; public and international affairs; business; arts and sciences; agriculture and environmental sciences; education; and journalism and mass communications. The university offers 22 baccalaureate degrees in more than 140 fields; 35 master's degrees in 137 fields; 19 education degrees; five doctoral degrees in 96 areas; and professional degrees in law, pharmacy and veterinary medicine.

The university and its Bulldawg sports teams help make Athens a quintessential college town and cultural center. The Georgia Museum of Art expanded in 2011, tripling its gallery space. The galleries at UGA's Lamar Dodd School of Art host revolving shows of established and emerging artists, complemented by dozens of independent galleries scattered around the city. The university's Performing Arts Center also showcases some of the world's best performers in jazz, ballet, world music and other genres.

A great way to get acquainted with downtown Athens is to tour the UGA campus. The UGA Visitors Center provides 75-minute tours led by university students. The center also has an information center staffed by knowledgeable college students.

Birthplace of New Wave Music

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Beyond the United States, Athens is best known as the birthplace of such bands as R.E.M., Widespread Panic and the B-52s. As the New Wave music movement swept the world in the 1980s, the documentary film "Athens, GA: Inside/Out" helped established the city's place as a hotbed of independent music. The city soon became known as the "Liverpool of the South" and the "birthplace of New Wave music" as bands such as R.E.M. and the B-52s burst into international fame. A number of R.E.M. members still live in Athens, where they are active in historic preservation and environmental causes.

The independent music movement continues to thrive today, spawning such contemporary acts as Danger Mouse, Of Montreal and the Drive-By Truckers. Dozens of clubs are open nightly, hosting the next wave of up-and-coming rock, pop and indie bands. In fact, *Rolling Stone* magazine recently named Athens as the "Number One College Music Scene in America".

Most of the nightlife, galleries, landmarks and attractions in Athens are centered around the UGA campus and the downtown area. Record stores, music cafes, music-related landmarks, funky boutiques and coffee shops can be found in renovated buildings throughout the area. For outdoor enthusiasts, the 313-acre State Botanical Gardens of Georgia offers nature trails, while the North Oconee River Greenway beckons bikers and hikers.

Athens has its share of oddities as well, from a rare double-barreled cannon to the "Tree That Owns Itself" – both documented in "Ripley's Believe It or Not". To explore Athens' must-see sites as well as its off-the-beaten-path attractions, pick up a guidebook at the Athens Visitors Center or visit them online at www.visitathensga.com.

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