

HOME & AWAY

The Big Peach

Cool aquariums and hot nightlife are just part of Atlanta's Southern charm.

By T.D. Griffith

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Where in the world can you find a mountain carving, two Nobel Peace Prizes, the world's largest aquarium, the home of an author whose sweeping Southern saga is out-sold only by the Bible and nightlife that will keep you rockin' into the wee hours? The Big Peach.

From mountain memorials to mesmerizing museums, belugas to botanical gardens and scholarly presidential libraries to late-night escapades, Atlanta is as alluring, authentic and neighborly as any elite domestic destination.

Steeped in History

Visitors here have little doubt that Atlanta retains enduring sensibilities to the Confederate South. The Atlanta History Center in the city's trendy Buckhead neighborhood houses the planet's leading collection of Civil War artifacts, while just eight miles northeast of the city center, the largest bas relief sculpture in the world memorializes the Confederacy at Stone Mountain.

Lovers of *Gone With the Wind* need only stop by the author's well-preserved, three-story Tudor Revival home, where daily tours give visitors an insightful look into Margaret Mitchell's life and her Pulitzer Prize-winning book.

But history enthusiasts gain their biggest charge by viewing two Nobel Peace Prizes within two miles of each other, the only place in the world that's possible. The Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site includes an impressive visitor center and adjacent Peace Plaza, complete with flowing fountains, the powerful *Behold* statue and the I Have a Dream World Peace Rose Garden.

King received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 for his tireless struggle for freedom and equality. Four years later, he was felled by an assassin's bullet in Memphis, where he had gone to support striking sanitation workers. His funeral was conducted April 9, 1968, at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, the same church in which he was baptized and, at 19, ordained as a minister. Recently restored and



The *Behold* monument at Atlanta's Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site reveals an infant silhouetted against a broad expanse of Georgia sky.

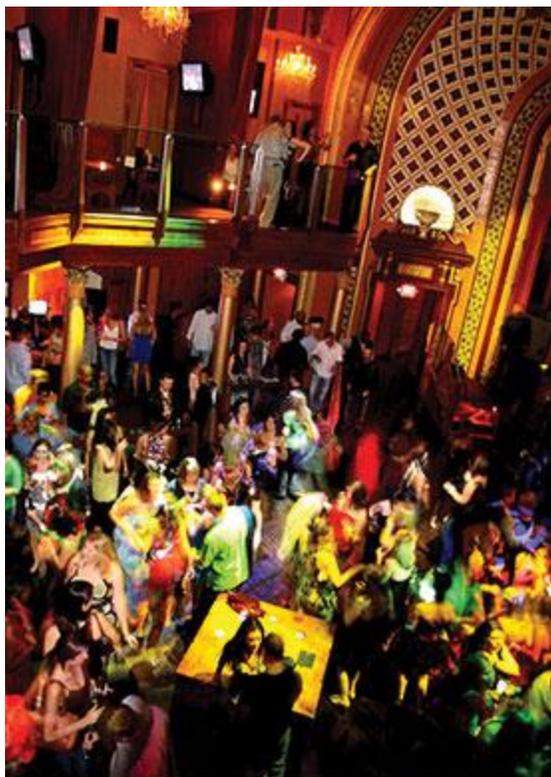
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operated in a partnership with the National Park Service, the church and King's boyhood home and burial site are open to the public.

Travelers could just jump in their vehicles and drive to the Jimmy Carter Library and Museum. But to truly gain a sense of the Sweet Auburn District and Atlanta's charming atmosphere, a one-and-a-half-mile walk on the Carter-King Peace Trail is the optimum means of visiting both venues. Along the route, six outdoor displays pay tribute to these two celebrated Georgians who spent their lives pursuing human and civil rights for all people.

Carter's presidential library reopened in late 2009 following a \$10 million restoration and remains one of Atlanta's most treasured destinations. Armed with an interactive museum, exhibits featuring everything from muckrakers to moon rocks, a replica of Carter's Oval Office, and special events

boasting best-selling authors, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnists and newsmakers including Harry Belafonte and Tom Brokaw, this is a must-see for anyone interested in U.S. history and the American presidency.



Partiers revel into the night at Atlanta's Opera Nightclub.

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Sea Life and Nightlife

Atlanta's Georgia Aquarium is the world's largest, and visitors can learn about, gaze upon, touch, and even swim, snorkel or scuba with many of its 120,000 animals of 500 different species.

With belugas, biologists, whale sharks, sleepovers, journeys with giants and behind-the-scene tours, this miraculous aquarium and its 8 million gallons of marine and fresh water is likely to be the highlight of your visit to the Big Peach.

When the sun sets, Atlanta comes to life. Myriad hot spots tame nocturnal prowlers, but a favorite remains the Opera Nightclub, noted for its VIP tables, party bus and hip-hop events that have patrons rockin' into the wee hours of the morning. Visitors are likely to stumble onto a birthday bash, a bachelorette party or dance acts with all the illumination and dizzying deejays and twice the high-amperage energy one longed for in high school. This is the place Atlanta plays after the sun goes down.

Trek softly.

Planning Your Trip

For more information on Atlanta, visit www.atlanta.net. For help planning your Georgia adventure, contact your AAA Travel agent or visit AAA.com/travel.

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