

THE TENNESSEAN

Atlanta a home run for family fun

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At Turner Field, home of the Atlanta Braves baseball team, you don't have to hit a home run in front of a cheering crowd to feel like a star.

The VIP Experience, a three-hour, private pregame stadium tour, allows fans a behind-the-scenes peek at areas reserved for a privileged few. Check out the air-conditioned luxury suites where Atlanta's big corporations entertain clients and glimpse the press box, manned at game time by iconic broadcasters such as Joe Simpson and play-by-play announcer Chip Caray. Learn what it takes to maintain all that perfectly manicured grass, and get the low down and how the Braves travel.

There are lots of perks to being VIP for a day, but one of the best is watching batting practice from the field. Your Little Leaguer will meet players and coaches, and maybe even go home with an autographed ball.



Fans learn fun facts and trivia about the Braves and the stadium. For instance, do you know why Turner Field rarely has rained-out games? Because a state-of-the-art, vacuum-enhanced drainage system with four miles of buried pipes can pump out 102,000 gallons of water in an hour, sucking puddles off the field in no time.

The \$252 million stadium was built in the early 1990s as a track-and-field venue for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games, with the understanding that after the closing ceremony, Centennial Olympic Stadium would be converted to a baseball field. It replaced the outdated Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium that was home to the Braves and the NFL's Atlanta Falcons.

A tour highlight is the Braves Museum & Hall of Fame, which chronicles the history of baseball's oldest continuously operating franchise from its 1871 origin in Boston through the present day. The museum exhibits more than 600 artifacts, including the 1995 World Series Trophy and the bat and ball used by Hank Aaron in 1974 to hit his 715th home run, shattering Babe Ruth's record.

VIPs have access to the exclusive 755 Club, a swanky retreat from the Southern heat. With panoramic views of the field and big-screen TVs all around, nobody misses a minute of the action.

Seats that were empty at the beginning of the tour are filled with hyped-up fans at its conclusion — time to take a seat and practice your tomahawk chop.

A Braves game is one reason to visit Atlanta, but there are many others, so before the first pitch take the family to some of the city's kid-centric attractions.

It's the real thing

On a hot summer day, a refreshing Inca Cola really hits the spot — if you happen to live in Peru. South Africans reach for a fruity Bibo, and until it was discontinued, Italians quenched their thirst with a bitter Beverly, definitely an acquired taste. All these products are made by the Coca-Cola Company, but most Americans have never heard of and certainly never tasted them.

At the World of Coca-Cola in downtown Atlanta, sipping these unusual soft drinks from around the world, and watching the reactions from those who do, is part of the fun. The Taste it! beverage lounge has more than 100 flavors, and while it's impossible to sample them all, a good strategy is to try a couple from each continent.

Coca-Cola, now an iconic American beverage, was invented in Atlanta by pharmacist John Stith Pemberton in 1886. The Vault of the Secret Formula tour introduces visitors to the history of Coca-Cola and reveals myths surrounding the closely guarded secret formula.

The Coca-Cola Loft features memorabilia and advertisements from past decades. It's the Real Thing. Have a Coke and a Smile. Americans of certain ages had these advertising slogans indelibly etched into their memories as kids, and today they invoke a sense of nostalgia — and a sudden craving for an ice-cold Coke.

Make a splash with the kids

The Georgia Aquarium is next door to the World of Coca-Cola, so it's easy to check out both attractions on the same day.

Plan your visit to the world's largest aquarium around AT&T Dolphin Tales, a spectacular production that showcases the rock stars of the marine world, Atlantic bottle-nosed dolphins. A story about dolphins is told through a Broadway-style musical performance by human actors and dolphins, a show sure to wow the whole family.

When five dolphins simultaneously propel themselves 20 feet in the air and then gracefully arc back into the water, a chorus of "oohs" and "aahs" resonates throughout the enclosed, 1,800-seat theater.

The aquarium has six exhibit galleries featuring marine life from tropical to Arctic waters, so allow at least half a day to explore.

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