



ATLANTA

Walking Tours in Atlanta

Advertisement

You never really understand a city until you walk around it a bit, and Atlanta's climate allows for walking tours almost year-round.

Sweet Auburn, the focus of the following walking tour, includes the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site, which comprises about 2 blocks along Auburn Avenue, plus the surrounding preservation district (about 10 more blocks). A neighborhood that nurtured scores of 20th-century black businesspeople and professionals, it contains the birthplace, church, and gravesite of Martin Luther King, Jr. The area was a vibrant commercial and entertainment district for black Atlantans from the late 1800s until the 1930s, when it went into a steep decline. In the 1980s, the area where Martin Luther King, Jr., was born and raised was declared a national historic site, and now, under the auspices of the National Park Service, portions of Auburn Avenue are in an ongoing process of restoration. Although parts of the area are still in sad disrepair, new landscaping has beautified some of the street, and several homes on the "Birth Home" block have been restored to their 1920s appearance. For more information about the national historic site, contact the **National Park Service** at tel. **404/331-6922**, or visit the website at www.nps.gov.

This walking tour provides insight into black history, the civil rights movement, and black urban culture in the South. If you're traveling with children, it's a wonderful opportunity to teach them about a great American.

A Walking Tour of Sweet Auburn

Start: The corner of Howell and Irwin streets. To get here, take I-75/85 S and exit at Freedom Parkway/Carter Center. Turn right at the first light onto International Boulevard. Follow signs to the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site. You can park in a lot on the north side of Irwin Street between Boulevard and Jackson Street. By MARTA: King Memorial station is about 8 blocks away, or you can take bus 3 east from the Five Points station.

Finish: Auburn Avenue and Courtland Street.

Time: Allow a half-day to explore this area thoroughly. If you want to include a tour of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, Birth Home (stop no. 3) -- and a visit to this area would not be complete without it -- start out early in the day and obtain your tickets at the National Park Service Visitor Center at 450 Auburn Ave. Only a limited number of tickets are available each day.

Begin your stroll at:

1. Howell and Irwin Streets

Walk south along Howell Street, where renovated historic homes and housing (designed to harmonize with the architecture of the neighborhood) provide testimony to the area's continuing renaissance. Note 102 Howell St., built between 1890 and 1895, which was the home of Alexander Hamilton, Jr., Atlanta's leading turn-of-the-20th-century black contractor. Its architectural details include Corinthian columns and a Palladian window.

Turn right on Auburn Ave. As you proceed, look for interpretive markers indicating historic homes (mostly Victorian and Queen Anne) and other points of interest en route to 499 Auburn Ave., home of:

2. The King Center

The organization here (tel. **404/526-8900**; www.thekingcenter.com) continues the work to which King was dedicated -- reducing violence within individual communities and among nations. Freedom Plaza, on the premises, is King's final resting place. Stop in to take a self-guided tour of exhibits on King's life and the civil rights movement. Admission is free; the center is open every day from 9am to 5pm.

Now double back a few blocks east to 501 Auburn Ave., the:

3. Birth Home of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Free half-hour guided tours are given on a continual basis, daily from 9am to 5pm, at King's birthplace. On weekends, especially, arrive early -- demand for tickets often exceeds supply. Tickets are obtained at the National Park Service Visitor Center, at 450 Auburn Ave.

Walk back toward stop no. 2, noting the turn-of-the-20th-century homes in the area, such as the:

4. Double "Shotgun" Row Houses

Standing at 472-488 Auburn Ave., these two-family dwellings with separate hip roofs were built in 1905 to house workers for the Empire Textile Company. They were called "shotgun" because rooms were lined up in a row, and one could (theoretically) fire a shotgun straight through the whole house.

Continue west on Auburn Ave. At the corner of Auburn Ave. and Boulevard is:

5. Fire Station No. 6

This is one of Atlanta's eight original firehouses, completed in 1894. The two-story Romanesque Revival building was situated to protect the eastern section of the city. The station houses a museum, open daily

from 9am to 5pm, where exhibits include restored fire engines and vintage fire-fighting paraphernalia.

Note the Italianate arched windows on the second story. Admission is free.

Continuing west on Auburn Ave., a notable stop on your tour is at 407 Auburn Ave., where you'll find the:

6. Ebenezer Baptist Church

This church (tel. **404/688-7263**), founded in 1886, is where Martin Luther King, Jr., served as copastor from 1960 to 1968. Short but informative tours are given Monday through Friday from 9am to 4pm, Saturday from 9am to 2pm, and Sunday from 2 to 4pm. The church has built a new sanctuary across the street, but the original building remains as a historic site under the auspices of the State Department of Parks and Recreation. The church is open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 5pm.

One block west, at 365 Auburn Ave., is the:

7. Wheat Street Baptist Church

This church has served a congregation since the late 1800s. Auburn Avenue was originally called Wheat Street in honor of Augustus W. Wheat, one of Atlanta's early merchants. The name was changed in 1893.

Farther west, on Auburn Ave. btw. Hilliard and Fort sts., is the:

8. Prince Hall Masonic Building

This was an influential black lodge led for several decades by John Wesley Dobbs. Today, it houses the national headquarters of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

On the other side of the expressway, at 228-250 Auburn Ave., note the:

9. Odd Fellows Building and Auditorium

This was another black fraternal lodge, which originated in Atlanta in 1870. Completed in 1914, the building later became headquarters for an insurance company.

Across the street, at 234 Auburn Ave., is the:

10. Sweet Auburn Bread Company

Auburn Avenue native Sonya Jones is known for her delectable sweets, from her signature sweet-potato cheesecake to red velvet cupcakes. Drop in for a cup of coffee, a one-serving-size cheesecake, and some delightful conversation at this Atlanta gem.

Make a left on Butler St., and you'll see the:

11. Butler Street YMCA

Built in the early 1900s, this was a popular meeting place for civil rights leaders. Today, the building is augmented by a modern YMCA across the street.

Continue south along Butler St. to the:

12. Sweet Auburn Curb Market

The market is located just below Edgewood Avenue. Formerly called the Municipal Market, this historic market dates from 1924, when Atlanta was still a segregated city. Whites shopped within, while blacks were only permitted to patronize stalls lining the curb. The market's current name reflects that era. Today, it sells groceries and fresh produce -- including many regional and ethnic items, such as ham hocks and chitlins ("We sell every part of the pig here but the oink," says the owner). Fully cooked ethnic meals are available as well, and there is seating so you can dig in right away. Open Monday through Thursday from 8am to 6pm, Friday and Saturday from 8am to 7pm.

13. Sweet Auburn Curb Market

This is a delightful mix of scents and sights. Seating is scattered throughout in case you just can't wait to get home to eat your purchases. Variety abounds, with fresh fish, meats, veggies, salads, and flowers to take home, plus fully cooked foods from every corner of the earth -- everything from specialty cheesecakes to chitlins. Open Monday through Saturday from 8am to 6pm. 209 Edgewood Ave. tel. 404/659-1665.

Walk back to Auburn Ave. on Butler St. and turn left. To your right, at 220 Auburn Ave., is the:

14. Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

This church was originally built in the 1890s, destroyed by fire, and then rebuilt in 1924. In the 1920s, John Wesley Dobbs called the Bethel "a towering edifice to black freedom."

Farther along, at 186 Auburn Ave., is the:

15. Royal Peacock Club

This music club's walls were painted from floor to ceiling with peacocks. It has been closed for years, but in its heyday it presented top black entertainers such as Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, and Dizzy Gillespie.

At 135 Auburn Ave., the corner of Auburn Ave. and Courtland St., is:

16. The APEX (African-American Panoramic Experience) Museum

This museum features exhibits on the history of Sweet Auburn and the African-American experience, including a children's gallery with interactive displays. You can call tel. **404/521-2739** to see if there's anything special happening at the museum while you're in town.

Cross the street to:

17. Herndon Plaza

Here, you can see exhibits on the high-powered Herndon family, including patriarch Alonzo Herndon, a former slave who started the Atlanta Life Insurance Company.

If you'd like to do further research on the history of Auburn Ave. -- or on any aspect of African-American history and culture -- continue on to 101 Auburn Ave., the:

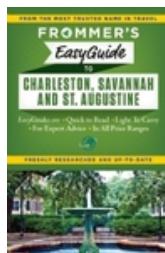
18. Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-American Culture and History

This is the place to go for answers about African-American history. Operated by the Atlanta-Fulton County Library System, the library's collection includes literature, documents, rare records, and more. A Heritage Center on the premises features special exhibits, workshops, seminars, lectures, and other events. Open Monday through Thursday from 10am to 8pm, and Friday through Sunday from noon to 6pm.

Note: This information was accurate when it was published, but can change without notice. Please be sure to confirm all rates and details directly with the companies in question before planning your trip.

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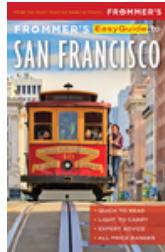
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