

club's highly regarded open-mic showcase, which has helped launch artists like John Mayer, Sugarland, the Indigo Girls and Shawn Mullins. A city of small towns Unlike a lot of cities, Atlanta doesn't have a central entertainment and shopping district. You know ... unless you love the Hard Rock and Hooters. If you're looking for a taste of Atlanta only downtown, you'll be disappointed. Instead, hit neighborhoods like Little Five Points, packed with record stores, live music and theater venues, restaurants, vintage clothing shops and the like (Not to mention a burger joint with a giant psychedelic skull for an entrance). Or similarly funky East Atlanta Village, where The Earl serves indie rock and brunch with equal skill and residents are so cool, they have their own Web radio station. For a slightly quieter good time, hit the square in downtown Decatur, which bumps up to Atlanta's eastern city limit and, in addition to being home to the aforementioned Eddie's Attic, features enough great restaurants that foodies have visited just to nosh at the spots packed within about a half-mile of each other. Cabbagetown. Virginia-Highland. Buckhead. Sweet Auburn. Castleberry Hill. West End. If you want to enjoy the real Atlanta, skip Hooters, catch a cab and enjoy some of what the city really has to offer. The story of civil rights The South teems with civil rights history, and different cities often focus on their slivers of the story. Atlanta has made a play to introduce the broad history to new generations by connecting the movement of the 1960s to the human rights issues of today. The National Center for Civil and Human Rights opened this year, offering comprehensive and sometimes intense views of the movement's darkest moments and greatest achievements. Another side of the museum presents an evolving look at modern human rights issues around the world. Just a few miles down the road, visitors can examine the lives of the movement's greatest leader, Martin Luther King Jr. Tours of King's birth home on Auburn Avenue are free, and tickets are often snapped up early in the day. Even visitors who don't score a trip through the stately yellow home can spend hours wandering the Martin Luther King Jr. Historic Site run by the National Park Service, peeking into historic Ebenezer Baptist Church or visiting the King Center -- the resting place of King and his wife, Coretta Scott King. Howard Finster's 'Paradise': The South's most inspired garden Beyond the big attractions When in Atlanta, you're basically obligated to cross the sugar-sticky floors of the World of Coca-Cola tasting room, to gawk at Margaret Mitchell's "Gone with the Wind"-era parlor and drop in on the latest big-name exhibition at the High Museum of Art. But you'll be missing out if you stop at the typical tourist draws. To get a deeper view of the city's history and personality, check out some of the smaller attractions not far from downtown. There's the Center for Puppetry Arts, where you can catch a puppet show geared toward kids or adults, or just get a close-up look at beloved puppets from Jim Henson Family Collection. Yes, your favorites are there, from the Swedish Chef to the Fraggles to Miss Piggy herself. Old and young can enjoy storytime at the Wren's Nest, the meticulously restored West End home of famed Atlanta writer Joel Chandler Harris, who wrote the beloved and controversial Uncle Remus tales. And just west of downtown, the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art offers fantastically curated exhibitions that focus on art by and about women of the African diaspora. For a glimpse of these and other out-of-the-way spots, as showcased by locals, take a look for the #WeLoveATL hashtag, started by a couple of photographers who didn't think the city was showing out on social media like it should, on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. Ditch the car - - no, really What if you could visit Atlanta and somehow excuse yourself from all the tired jokes about terrible traffic? (Punchline: Your time is worthless! HA! Ha?) Believe it; it can be done. There