

The Best of Atlanta

“How do I get to Tara?”

“Where are Scarlett and Rhett buried?”

“Why do you put sugar in iced tea but not on grits?”

“Just what is a grit anyway?”

Some visitors come to Atlanta looking for Old South stereotypes—white-columned mansions surrounded by magnolias, owned by slow-moving folks with accents as thick as molasses. What they find is a lot more cosmopolitan and a heck of a lot more interesting.

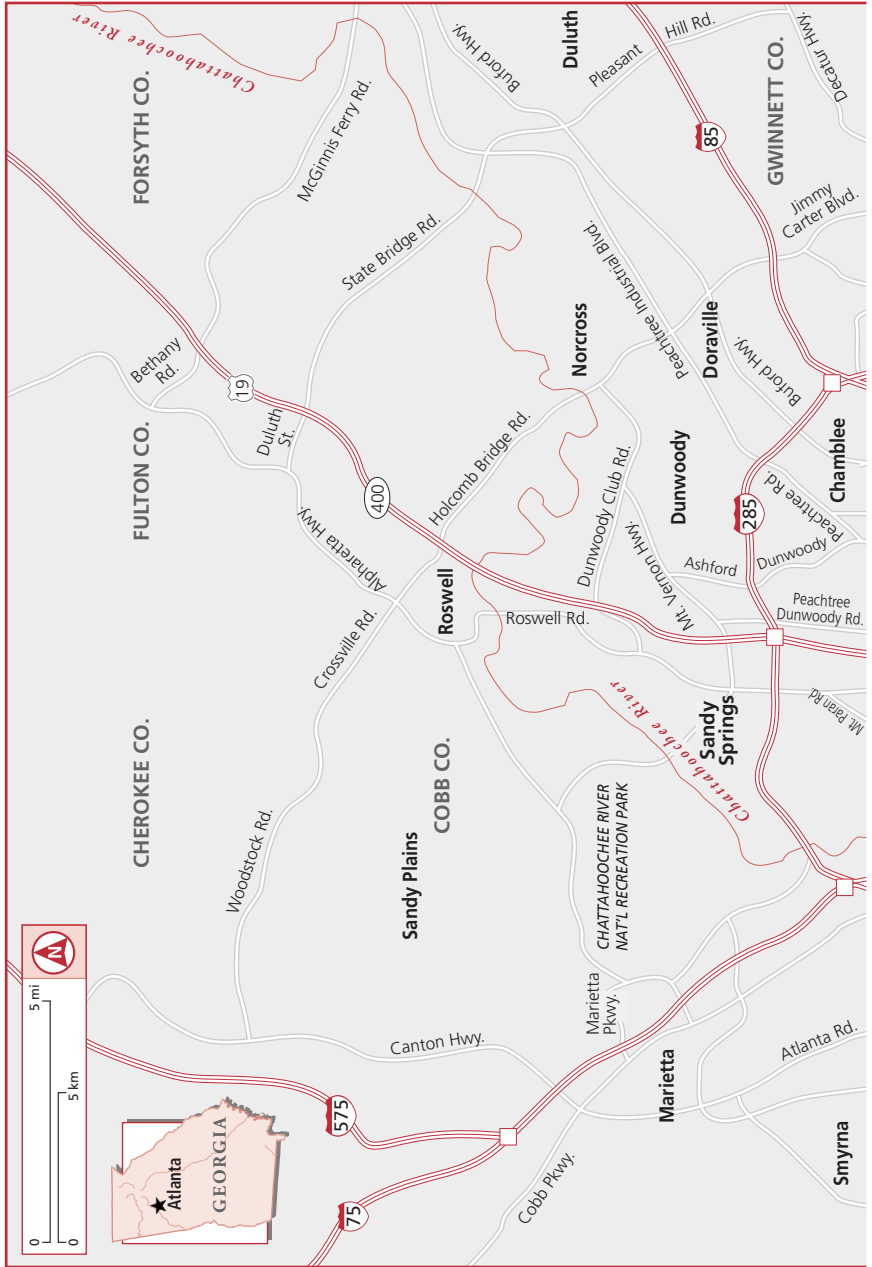
When Gen. William Sherman burned Atlanta to the ground in 1864, the city rose from those smoldering bitter ashes and has not looked back since. Instead, it has spent the last 140 years or so building what’s been described as the Capital of the New South and the Next Great International City. Atlanta’s heritage may be Southern, but the current dynamic is brashly Sunbelt, and now it’s straight-up economic vitality that drives this city’s engines.

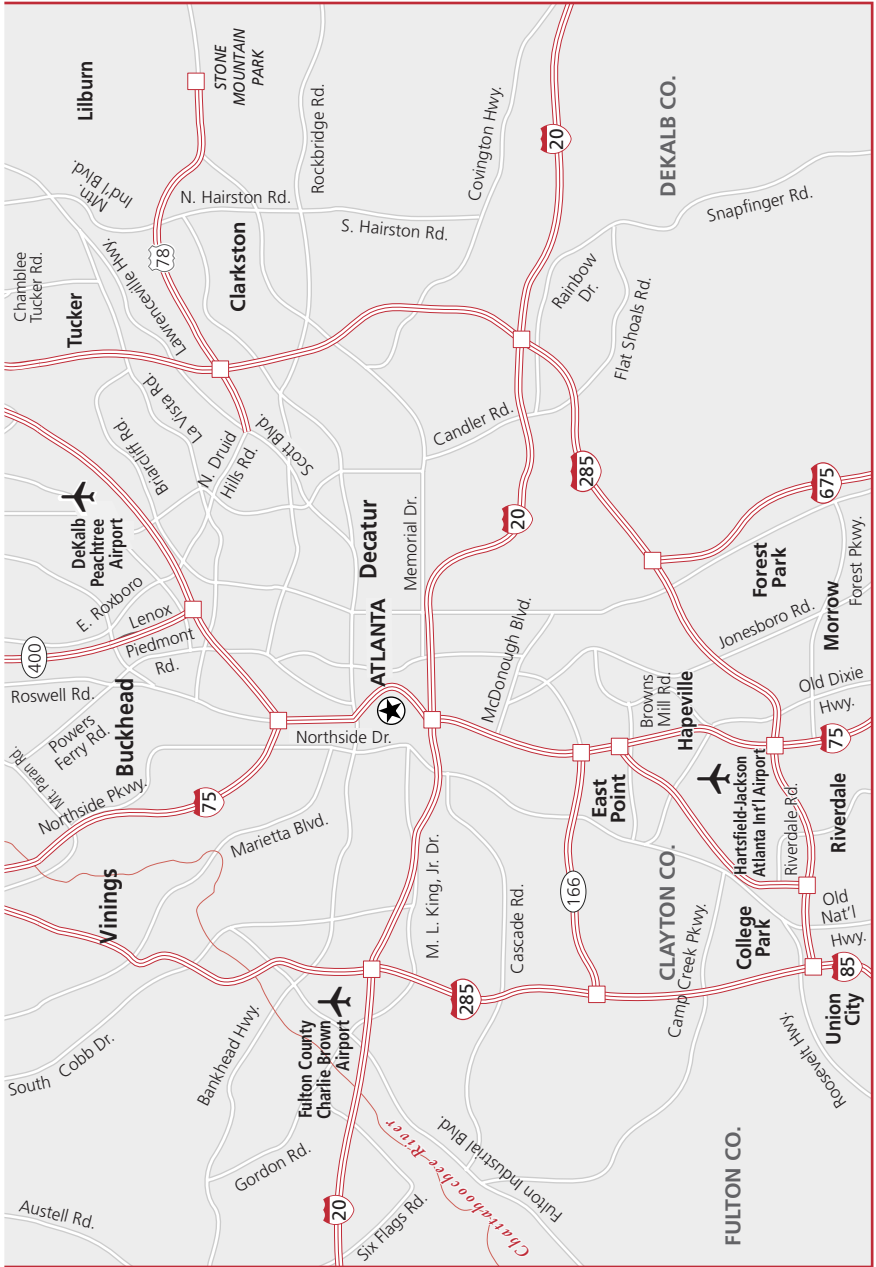
Atlanta is and always has been a city on the move. Longtime mayor William B. Hartsfield called it the city “too busy to hate,” and the spirit of Atlanta is one of working together to get the job done. The dramatic downtown skyline, with its gleaming skyscrapers, is testimony to Atlanta’s inability to sit still—even for a minute. And its role as host for the Centennial Olympic Games in 1996 finally convinced the rest of the world that Atlanta is a force to be reckoned with—and a great place to visit. Recent projects have only reinforced that notion. These new ventures include the \$214-million, 70,500-seat Georgia Dome, which hosted the Super Bowl in 2000 and will host basketball’s Final Four again in 2007; the 5-million-gallon Georgia Aquarium, completed in 2005; and the new World of Coca-Cola, coming this year.

Consistently ranked one of the best cities in the world in which to do business, Atlanta is headquarters for hundreds of corporations, including Coca-Cola, Delta Air Lines, UPS, Holiday Inn, Georgia-Pacific, Home Depot, BellSouth, and Cox Enterprises, and has become a magnet for many Internet-related companies. A major convention city and a crossroads where three interstate highways converge, it’s home to the country’s busiest airport. And all those convention-goers certainly find many places to spend money—Atlanta is considered the shopping capital of the Southeast. Although the city limits are only 131 square miles, the metro area is vast and sprawling. With a population of 4.1 million and still counting, there seems to be no limit to its growth.

But commerce and development are not the only things that characterize this bustling metropolis. Its success is due in no small part to its quality of life, which is hard to beat. Atlanta is often called the City of Trees, and the streets are indeed filled with dogwoods and azaleas. The city has a small-town quality to it, with dozens of

The Atlanta Region





neighborhoods and parks. A temperate climate makes Atlanta a magnet for anyone who enjoys the outdoors, and the city's Southern roots ensure graciousness and hospitality. As Atlanta has grown in stature, it has attracted residents from across the continent and around the world, further enriching the city's social fabric. You'll still hear gentle Southern accents here, but at least half of Atlanta's citizens were born outside the South. Interestingly, many of these transplants find themselves bending to the local customs, saying "please" and "ma'am" and holding doors open for one another.

When H. L. Mencken came south early in the 20th century, he branded Atlanta a cultural wasteland. Media mogul Ted Turner inaugurated CNN here in 1980, and subsequently launched Superstation TBS, *Headline News*, and TNT. Also in 1980, the revitalized African-American neighborhood of Sweet Auburn became a national historic district, with 10 blocks of notable sites including Martin Luther King, Jr.'s boyhood home, his crypt, the church where he preached, a museum, and the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change. It is probably *the* major black historical attraction in the country, and in the last several years it has undergone a major revitalization and restoration.

Atlanta is home to major art, science, nature, and archaeology museums; a vibrant theater community; an outstanding symphony orchestra; a well-regarded ballet company; opera; blues; jazz; Broadway musicals; a presidential library; Confederate and African-American heritage sites; and dozens of art galleries. Add to those leisure options such attractions as Stone Mountain Park, a regional theme park, a botanical garden, and professional sports teams, and you have the makings of a lively and sophisticated city. The culinary spectrum here ranges from grits and biscuits to caviar and sushi. Sure, you can still feast on fried chicken and barbecue, but Atlanta also serves up cuisine from across the globe.

Of great significance is the recent development downtown. For years, city leaders have tried to encourage central city living, and it's finally beginning to take hold as developers remake old buildings into attractive apartments and lofts. The mark of a great city is an attractive and vital downtown area where people live as well as work, and Atlanta finally appears to be headed in that direction.

Atlanta now has Shirley Franklin, the first African-American female elected as mayor of this busy city. Her vision for this heart of the New South is expansive, and she's not too shy to tell you all about it. So if it's hoop skirts and plantations you've got your heart set on, go on down to your local bookstore and pick up a copy of *Gone with the Wind*. But if you want to visit a vibrant, energetic city that's rich in heritage, culture, fine cuisine, entertainment, and commerce, Atlanta runs right up there with the big dogs.

1 Frommer's Favorite Atlanta Experiences

- **Stepping Back in Time at the Atlanta History Center:** A re-created farm (with original buildings from the 1840s) shows how rural Southern folks really lived before the Civil War, and the beautifully restored 1928 Swan House, an estate on the property, gives a fascinating glimpse into

the lifestyle enjoyed by upper-crust Atlantans in the early 20th century. Kids will love the hands-on discovery areas at the history museum. Explore the walking trails after you take in the exhibits. It all adds up to great look at the rich tapestry of Atlanta's past and present. See p. 150.

- **Frolicking in the Fountain:** The biggest attraction at Centennial Olympic Park is the Fountain of Rings, where young and old can get delightfully soaked on warm days. The fountain is a simple but ingenious design on the plaza floor, consisting of 251 water jets in the shape of the five Olympic rings. Take a deep breath and zip in and around the 12-foot water bursts, or just sit and watch the timed light-and-sound-effects show, when the water bursts 35 feet into the air. See p. 152.
- **Touring the CNN Studios:** The network that started round-the-clock television news lets you take a peek behind the scenes to see how it's all done. You can even have a videotape made of yourself reading the day's top stories from behind a CNN anchor desk. See p. 154.
- **Time-Traveling at Fernbank Museum of Natural History:** Check out the 45-foot-long model of a *Giganotosaurus*, then travel back 15 billion years and experience the Big Bang that jump-started the formation of the universe. The museum's stunning architecture is notable. IMAX films are shown here, too. See p. 155.
- **Discovering the Fox Theatre:** This Moorish-Egyptian palace exemplifies the glamorous movie-theater architecture of the 1920s, complete with onion domes, minarets, and a twinkling starlit sky over the auditorium. See p. 156.
- **Marveling at the Creatures in the Georgia Aquarium:** Even if you have only a day or two to spend in the city, this is a must-see. The Georgia Aquarium, the largest in the country, continues to draw mind-boggling numbers of visitors every day. The highlights include giant whale sharks and unforgettable exhibits in five major categories, from river life to sea life from foreign waters around the planet. A 4-D movie, numerous opportunities for dining and shopping, and amazing play spaces for the little ones provide a full day of fun at this hot spot. Plan to order advance tickets online, as huge crowds continue to converge on this attraction. See p. 157.
- **Exploring the King Center:** It's an inspiring experience to visit this living memorial to a true American hero. You'll see lots of King memorabilia and a film on his life and works. Especially moving is Freedom Plaza, where Dr. King is buried. The tomb is inscribed with his words: "Free at Last. Free at Last. Thank God Almighty I'm Free at Last." See p. 159.
- **Strolling around Oakland Cemetery:** This 88-acre cemetery is a peaceful place, and its Victorian graves are of aesthetic, historic, and symbolic interest. The guided tour is recommended. Bring a picnic lunch; even your dog is welcome to hang out here (on a leash). See p. 166.
- **Relaxing in Stone Mountain Park:** Take a hike to the top of the big granite rock or spend a leisurely day taking in the diverse attractions, from a paddlewheel cruise to a living museum of Southern history. You can also choose from an array of activities—golf, tennis, swimming, hiking, boating, and more. See p. 167.
- **Touring the World of Coca-Cola:** Atlanta is Coke's hometown, so it's only fitting that there's a museum dedicated to the world's most renowned beverage. Come see the gigantic collection of memorabilia, explore the interactive exhibits, and take the opportunity to sample Coke beverages from around the world. A new 75,000-square-foot facility opens soon near Centennial Park and the Georgia Aquarium. See p. 170.

Tips Cheers to the New World of Coca-Cola

With downtown revitalization at the top of the list for Atlanta leaders and developers, the proposal for a new and improved World of Coca-Cola right next to the well-attended Georgia Aquarium was well received. The new cola museum will further focus on the storied history of Coca-Cola, while also celebrating consumer connections with the brand in new and exciting ways. State-of-the-art technology and story-telling techniques will make the guest experience interactive and engaging.

These two projects, along with Imagine It! Children's Museum, the CNN Center, Philips Arena, and the Tabernacle—the latter two being popular entertainment venues—should be a much-needed shot in the arm for the downtown residential and commercial markets. These developments will no doubt make the downtown area *the* place to be in this city, for visitors, residents, and convention-goers alike.

- **Hanging Out at the Zoo:** Ever since the giant pandas, Yang Yang and Lun Lun, arrived at Zoo Atlanta, this has been one of the hottest tickets in town. It's been even more popular since the arrival of baby Mei Lan, in 2006. You don't have to be a kid to be fascinated by these adorable creatures. See p. 185.
- **Getting a Breath of Fresh Air in Piedmont Park:** Atlanta's favorite public park is fun and funky and a terrific place to watch the world go by. Take your in-line skates or pack a lunch and find a shady spot for a picnic. See p. 189.
- **Spending a Day at the Ballpark:** Pack up the kids and take them out to the old ballgame. Even if there isn't a Braves game scheduled, you can take a tour of Turner Field, play in Tooner Field playground, and visit the museum. The ballpark served as the Olympic Stadium for the 1996 Olympic Games. See p. 195.
- **Trekking through Virginia-Highland:** Atlanta's version of New York's Greenwich Village or SoHo, this trendy neighborhood is full of coffee bars, galleries, cafes, and funky little boutiques. It all makes for a pleasant stroll on a sunny afternoon. For some of the shopping highlights, see p. 63.
- **Shopping at Lenox Square:** One of the most popular malls in the Southeast, Lenox Square is a mecca for affluent shoppers. It's hard to visit every store, even if you spend the whole day, but many visitors think it's a worthy goal. You'll find good restaurants and great people-watching, too. See p. 209.
- **Spending the Morning at the Market:** Atlanta is home to two gigantic indoor farmers' markets, both jammed with locals who are shopping in earnest and visitors who have a hard time keeping their eyes from bugging out. Choose from the DeKalb Farmers' Market, which has an international flavor, and Harry's, which is a little more upscale. Each has loads of gourmet goodies you can take home or consume on the spot. See p. 213.
- **Taking in a Chastain Park Amphitheatre Concert:** Big-name entertainers perform under the stars,

and everyone brings elaborate picnic fare (some people even bring tablecloths and candelabra for the picnic

table). Even the entertainers seem dazzled by the setting. See p. 219.

2 Best Hotel Bets

- **Best for Business Travelers:** All the major downtown megahotels—which cater largely to a business and convention clientele—are fully equipped to meet your business needs. The finest is the **Ritz-Carlton Atlanta**, 181 Peachtree St. NE (☎ 800/241-3333), which combines a full business center and a can-do concierge with superb service. See p. 76.
- **Best for Families:** The **Residence Inn by Marriott Buckhead**, 2960 Piedmont Rd. NE (☎ 800/331-3131), offers accommodations large enough to ensure privacy for all, plus fully equipped kitchens, washers and dryers, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, barbecue grills, and basketball, volleyball, and paddle tennis courts. Many rooms even have fireplaces. See p. 99.
- **Best for a Romantic Getaway:** You'll fall for each other all over again at the luxurious **Four Seasons Hotel**, 75 14th St. (☎ 800/819-5053), an elegant choice with lavish guest rooms, luxurious marble tubs, and impeccable service. See p. 84.
- **Best Moderately Priced Hotel:** It's hard to beat the **Residence Inn by Marriott Downtown**, 134 Peachtree St. NW (☎ 800/331-3131). It offers a convenient location, large rooms, and a bundle of amenities for a very reasonable price. See p. 81.
- **Best Inexpensive Accommodations:** It's nothing fancy, but the convenient Buckhead location of the **Sleep Inn**, 800 Sidney Marcus Blvd. (☎ 800/753-3746), makes this a good deal. See p. 100.
- **Best Location:** Buckhead is one of the loveliest—and busiest—parts of town, offering exceptional nightlife, dining, and shopping. There are two MARTA stations (Buckhead and Lenox) where you can connect to other parts of the city, and any hotel within walking distance of either of those stations is a sure bet. A good example is the **J. W. Marriott Hotel Buckhead**, 3300 Lenox Rd. NE (☎ 800/613-2051), adjacent to the upscale Lenox Square mall. See p. 92.
- **Best Service:** The **Four Seasons Hotel**, 75 14th St. (☎ 800/819-5053), continues to wow visitors with its attention to detail and supreme service. The **Ritz-Carlton Atlanta**, 181 Peachtree St. NE (☎ 800/241-3333), and the **Ritz-Carlton Buckhead**, 3434 Peachtree Rd. NE (☎ 800/241-3333), are tied for a close second. See p. 84, 76, and 93 for each hotel, respectively.
- **Best Architectural Digest Interior:** The towering **Grand Hyatt Atlanta**, 3300 Peachtree Rd. (☎ 800/233-1234), offers a stunning combination of 18th-century American architecture and Japanese attention to aesthetic detail. A 9,000-square-foot garden features waterfalls viewable from the lobby overlook. See p. 91.
- **Best Trendy Hotel:** The **Westin Buckhead Atlanta**, 3391 Peachtree Rd. NE (☎ 404/365-0065), with its clean Euro-modern style, is a favorite among visiting celebrities. The chic **W Atlanta**, 111 Perimeter Center W. (☎ 770/396-6800), is another trendy fave. See p. 94.
- **Best for Travelers with Disabilities:** The **Embassy Suites Atlanta Buckhead**, 3285 Peachtree Rd. NW (☎ 800/362-2779), is fully accessible,

with 10 suites completely equipped for visitors with disabilities (some with roll-in showers, too). The hotel is just a block away from the Buckhead MARTA station. See p. 97.

- **Best for Pets:** Some hotels get downright snooty if you try to check in

with your pooch, but not the trendy **Hotel Indigo**, 683 Peachtree St. (☎ 404/874-9200). All pets are welcome—no fees, no weight limit. If you're in town on Tuesdays, don't miss Canine Cocktail Hour in the bar. See p. 90.

3 Best Dining Bets

- **Best Spot for a Business Lunch:** Power brokers head for steaks at **Bone's**, 3130 Piedmont Rd. NE (☎ 404/237-2663), in Buckhead, where the food is serious and the service is impeccable and unobtrusive. See p. 123.
- **Best Spot for a Romantic Dinner:** There's no better spot than the tree-shaded terrace at **Horseradish Grill**, 4320 Powers Ferry Rd. (☎ 404/255-7277). See p. 132.
- **Best Spot for a Celebration:** Why not pick one of the most sought-after tables in town? That would be at **Bacchanalia**, 1198 Howell Mill Rd. (☎ 404/365-0410). See p. 113.
- **Best Newcomer: Lobby at Twelve**, 361 17th St. (☎ 404/961-7370), inhabits the 5,000-square-foot space at the bottom of Atlantic Station's Twelve Hotel. Lobby offers two dining rooms divided by an open kitchen, serving up a diverse menu. See p. 112.
- **Best View: Canoe**, 4199 Paces Ferry Rd. NW, in Vinings (☎ 770/432-2663), is perched on the north side of the Chattahoochee River. Ask for a table on the large, canopied patio, surrounded by landscaped gardens, and watch the river go by. See p. 142.
- **Best Wine List: The Dining Room** at the Ritz-Carlton Buckhead, 3434 Peachtree Rd. NE (☎ 404/237-2700), is Atlanta's premier dining venue, and its cuisine is complemented by a vast wine cellar. See p. 126.
- **Best Italian Cuisine:** It's noisy as the devil, but **Sotto Sotto**, 313 N. Highland Ave. (☎ 404/523-6678), gets my vote for its inspired Northern Italian cuisine. See p. 140.
- **Best Italian on a Budget: Pasta da Pulcinella**, 1123 Peachtree Walk (☎ 404/876-1114), serves gourmet pasta for next to nothing. See p. 118.
- **Best Seafood: The Atlanta Fish Market**, 265 Pharr Rd. (☎ 404/262-3165), is the ticket, with an enormous selection of fresh seafood dishes that are done to perfection. See p. 130.
- **Best New Southern Cuisine:** The competition is stiff, but the **Horseradish Grill** (see "Best Spot for a Romantic Dinner," above) wins by a hair. See p. 132.
- **Best Traditional Southern Cuisine:** It's a tie between **Colonnade**, 1879 Cheshire Bridge Rd. NE (☎ 404/874-5642), keeper of the best heirloom recipes; and **Mary Mac's Tea Room**, 224 Ponce de Leon Ave. NE (☎ 404/876-1800), a legend in this city for more than 60 years. See p. 120 and 118, respectively.
- **Best Southwestern Cuisine: Nava**, 3060 Peachtree Rd. (☎ 404/240-1984), is a stunning restaurant with food to match. See p. 132.
- **Best Steakhouse:** There's quite a turf war going on, but **Bone's** (see "Best Spot for a Business Lunch," above), that powerhouse for powerbrokers, gets my vote. See p. 123.

Fun Fact The Importance of P.C.

P.C. is a big priority in Atlanta. No, no—not P.C., as in political correctness. P.C., as in pimento cheese. And let's get the pronunciation down right off the bat. It's puh-MEN-uh cheese, an utterly simple but delightful mixture, usually consisting of just three main ingredients—canned pimentos, cheese, and some sort of binder, probably mayonnaise—slapped between two pieces of white bread. Southern cooks have hot debates over the fine points. Cheddar or Monterey Jack? Sharp or extra sharp? Duke's mayonnaise or Hellmann's? Is onion okay? How about red-pepper flakes?

Regardless of the mixture, a pimento-cheese sandwich is right up there with grits as one of the ultimate Southern comfort foods. It's usually a homemade concoction, not found on many restaurant menus. But Scott Peacock, renowned executive chef of Watershed (p. 143) in Decatur, has seen fit to include it among his lunch *and* dinner offerings. Here's his take on the venerable Southern classic. We recommend adding a little more mayonnaise.

Watershed's Pimento Cheese

- 2½ cups (10 oz.) extra-sharp cheddar cheese, grated
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste
- salt to taste, if needed
- 5 or 6 grinds of black pepper
- ¾ cup homemade mayonnaise
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped pimento

In a mixing bowl, stir together all of the ingredients until well mixed and creamy. Taste carefully for seasoning and adjust as needed. Cover and keep refrigerated until ready to use. Makes about 2 cups.

- **Best Fried Chicken:** There are lots of New Southern restaurants trying to invent newfangled ways to cook fried chicken. Well, they should just cut it out. And you should head to the **Colonnade** (see “Best Traditional Southern Cuisine,” above) for some of the best fried chicken you've ever tasted. This establishment has been turning it out for years, and they know what they're doing. See p. 120.
- **Best Brunch:** The winner of this category can be no other than **Murphy's**, 997 Virginia Ave. NE (☎ 404/872-0904), where the serving of American and Continental cuisine has transitioned right along with this funky neighborhood. See p. 139.
- **Best Breakfast:** The fun and funky **Flying Biscuit Cafe**, 1655 McLendon Ave. (☎ 404/687-8888), fulfills all the usual breakfast expectations, and also offers a great selection of off-beat specialties. See p. 142.
- **Best Afternoon Tea:** Fresh-baked scones with Devonshire cream, finger sandwiches, pastries, and tea are served every afternoon in the posh lobby lounge of the **Ritz-Carlton Buckhead**, 3434 Peachtree Rd. NE (☎ 800/241-3333). See p. 93.

- **Best Desserts: Bacchanalia** (see “Best Spot for a Celebration,” above) takes this category with its warm Valrhona chocolate cake with vanilla-bean ice cream—a flourless confection with a sinful, gooey center. They tried to take it off the menu once, but the public outcry was too great. See p. 113.
- **Best Late-Night Dining:** Head to the 24/7 **R. Thomas Deluxe Grill**, 1812 Peachtree St. NW (☎ 404/872-2942), where you can eat some of the healthiest fare in town at any hour of the day. See p. 121.
- **Best Decor: Bluepointe**, 3455 Peachtree Rd. NE (☎ 404/237-9070), is an energy-filled multilevel restaurant in a soaring contemporary space. Its dramatic decor feels very of-the-moment and classy. See p. 131.
- **Best People-Watching:** Famous beefeaters flock to **Bone’s** (see “Best Spot for a Business Lunch,” above), which has welcomed the likes of Bob Hope, George Bush, and the Atlanta Braves. See p. 123.
- **Best Pre- and Post-Theater Dining:** If you’re attending a show at the Woodruff Arts Center—Atlanta’s major performance facility—dine at **Veni Vidi Vici**, 41 14th St. (☎ 404/875-8424), which opens early enough to have a relaxing meal. For post-theater noshing, try **South City Kitchen**, 1144 Crescent Ave. (☎ 404/873-7358). See p. 120 and 119, respectively.