

GOING PLACES: CHATTANOOGA

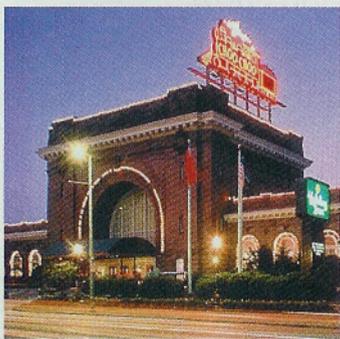
River Town on a Roll

Memphis loves to sing them blues, but in Chattanooga the tune is “go green.” The river town has come a long way since being designated America’s most polluted city in 1969. Today, 22 miles of once inaccessible riverfront have been reclaimed for public use, and revitalization projects have made this city a model eco town and a tourist hot spot.

—Hilda J. Brucker

SEE

The Tennessee Aquarium showcases freshwater and saltwater habitats so visitors can enjoy creatures ranging from playful otters to colorful coral-reef fish and sharks. Behind the scenes, staffers work to restore declining populations of native species (tnaqua.org). At the Chattanooga Nature Center, hike the boardwalk that traverses an engineered wetland filled with local flora and fauna. The wetland also filters wastewater generated by the visitor’s center (chattnature.org). On a rainy day, enjoy paintings in the Hunter Museum of American Art and the panoramic view from its location on an 80-foot bluff above the river (huntermuseum.org).



SLEEP

Recycled buildings are Chattanooga’s forte. Stay at the Chattanooga Choo-Choo, where a 1908 train terminal escaped the wrecking ball to become the opulent lobby of a Holiday Inn. Besides modern rooms, visitors can bunk down in refurbished sleeper cars from Victorian-era trains (choochoo.com). The Mayor’s Mansion Inn, once the private home of Chattanooga’s first mayor, has been rescued from years of disrepair to become a three-story, eighteen-room bed and breakfast (mayorsmansioninn.com). And the Stone Fort Inn is a cozy 1909 tavern furnished with antiques and claw-foot tubs (stonefortinn.com).

TASTE

Local fare wins out over the national chains in Chattanooga. Enjoy gourmet dining downtown at 212 Market, Tennessee’s first eatery to be certified by the Green Restaurant Association—if you opt for take-out, you’ll receive to-go utensils made from a biodegradable potato product instead of plastic (212market.com). At Lupi’s Pizza, fresh ingredients come from local farmers whenever possible; choose from 30 toppings at three locations (lupi.com). On Market Street, Country Life Vegetarian Restaurant serves up lunches containing no dairy, eggs, or animal products, from 11am to 2:30pm daily.



BUY

It’s easy to spend a whole day browsing Frazier Avenue, a former warehouse district turned specialty-shop center featuring jewelry, pottery, hand-blown glass, botanical-based soaps and candles, toys, clothing, and more. Highlights include Frankie and Julian’s, a boutique that carries knitwear fashioned from organically-grown bamboo. On the South Side, Rugina’s Afrikan Village sells imported jewelry, wooden masks, ceramics, musical instruments, and sculptures bought directly from the artisans, helping to provide a livelihood to some of the poorest villages in Africa.



MOVE

Chattanooga is an extremely walkable city, with pedestrian-only bridges, trails, and passageways that connect previously fragmented areas and once more link the city to the riverfront. A free, zero-emissions electric shuttle runs between downtown hotels, restaurants, shops, and attractions. Commuting by bike is also a breeze, with an award-winning system of marked bicycle lanes and a Rack-n-ride program that lets cyclists go the distance by combining pedal power and public transportation along the city’s seventeen bus routes.



ALSO WORTH NOTING

Using a process developed by local company Astec Inc., repaving projects are being done with “green asphalt”—a product that includes 50 percent recycled asphalt and is mixed at low temperatures in order to reduce emissions (astecinc.com). Solar panels on many of Chattanooga’s public buildings feed energy back into the grid. The Chattanooga Convention Center uses natural light, fresh-air ventilation, and a rooftop system that collects rainwater for irrigation (chattconvention.org). Construction is underway on the state’s first LEED-certified, mixed-use development, and plans are on the drawing board for a green roof on a Renaissance Park pavilion.