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Destination of the Week: Athens, Ga.

Red and black make room for green in the Classic City.

By *Lori Johnston*

Sat, Apr 11 2009 at 5:52 AM EST

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GREEN U: Athens residents and visitors enjoy all of the eco-minded activities Athens has to offer. (Photo: Athens Convention and Visitors Bureau)

The small college town of Athens, Ga., is thinking big when it comes to going green.

It's evident from the products sold in trendy shops, the food in local restaurants, and the pedestrian-friendly [University of Georgia](#) and vibrant downtown, just across Broad Street from campus.

The city pays special attention to its large community of cyclists, with dedicated bike lanes and a must-see cycling competition every spring, and has earned kudos for its transportation station, where city and university buses pick up students, residents and visitors. Athens, located about 60 miles east of downtown Atlanta, also boasted Georgia's first municipally operated residential curbside recycling program.

Whether you're visiting to cheer on the Bulldogs (or their opponents), hear your favorite band or possibly check out the school, the town might give you an education

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on going green, too.

Stay green

Accommodations include chain hotels such as Holiday Inn and Hilton Garden Inn and a few locally owned properties, but much of the eco-buzz is being generated by [Hotel Indigo](#). Set to open in fall 2009 on College Avenue in downtown Athens, the 130-room upscale hotel aims to receive LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. Features will include a green roof, outdoor cistern that collects rainwater for irrigation, elevators that self-power after use, an energy-efficient heating and air-conditioning system, priority parking for hybrid vehicles, bicycle racks and an on-site public transit stop.

Go green

The city's industrial-looking multimodal transit center, built on an old brownfield site, was named a "[Development of Excellence](#)" by the Urban Land Institute, Atlanta District in 2008. It provides a downtown hub for buses, cyclists, taxis and pedestrians — and also has potential for commuter rail from Atlanta. Officials say the \$9 million station has contributed to a 10 percent increase in Athens Transit ridership the past two years.

It's also common to share the road with cyclists either commuting to work or school or preparing for competition, and the city hosts the annual [Twilight Criterium](#) each April. The professional cycling event culminates in an exhilarating Saturday night race through downtown streets. Groups such as [BikeAthens](#) and [Athens Grow Green Coalition](#) also work to promote alternative forms of transportation and to protect the town's environmental quality.



See green

A tour of UGA's scenic, 605-acre [main campus](#) is a must for visitors, from North Campus' historic buildings and oak trees to newer development farther south and east. Some of the new buildings boast eco-friendly features, such as the plant-filled green roof created to conserve energy and water atop the Lamar Dodd School of Art's [new building](#), which opened in 2008.

There's always something to do in Athens, and people mark their calendars for annual events such as [AthFest](#), a popular weekend-long music festival in June where you'll

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find organic and Earth-friendly items in the artists market. Other events have included the [EcoFocus Film Festival](#) and a [Green Life Expo](#), as well as lectures throughout the year at UGA related to the environment and sustainability. The city also is home to the [State Botanical Garden of Georgia](#), a perfect spot for leisurely walks, programs and events.



Eat green

There's more than just pizza joints in Athens. [Farm 255](#), housed in a building built in the 1930s, is on the same block as Athens' legendary [40 Watt Club](#) and boasts a nightly menu with fresh ingredients grown at its [Full Moon Farms](#). Favorites include the veggie plate featuring heirloom sweet potato fries, marinated cauliflower and chickpea-and-tarator salad, and other entrees such as the pasture-raised chicken and the burger made from grass-fed beef. The tiny [Daily Groceries Co-op](#) has locally grown, organic produce, homemade items such as salsa, chicken salad and syrup, and shelves packed with other boxed and canned organic items. From May through November, a farmers market is set up on Saturdays at Bishop Park. On Thursdays, residents and restaurants gather at the old state farmers market building to pick up items they've ordered from a small group of growers known as [Athens Locally Grown](#).

Shop green

Downtown's streets are lined with bars, restaurants and shops, including eclectic gift stores and hip clothing boutiques catering to co-eds. Head to [Helix](#) for its selection of organic and recycled items, from colorful rugs made with scrap fabric to bamboo utensils, plates and cutting boards to bags made with old vinyl billboards and bottles. The [Downtown Development Authority](#) has latched onto the tote trend, selling a \$10 messenger bag made of recycled material.

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COMMENTS

Posted By Andrea Dono - Mon, Apr 13 2009 at 2:04 PM EST

Rehabbing Buildings is Green!

Athens should also be recognized for its historic preservation ethic - after all, using an existing building is the ultimate form of recycling! The Downtown Development Authority supports economic development and community revitalization, which keep existing buildings in good shape and filled with great businesses. Rather than adding to landfill waste from tearing down historic buildings to build new structures, Athens protects its history while being sustainable. As a result, the historic "Main Street" (downtown) is not only green, but is also such a great place to visit that the National Trust for Historic Preservation named it a 2009 Dozen Distinctive Destination. <http://www.preservationnation.org/travel-and-sites/travel/dozen-distinct...>

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Posted By Michelle Brooks - Thu, Apr 09 2009 at 2:35 PM EST

Amazing Athens

Thanks for covering Athens and many of the gifts she has to offer!!

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Posted By Paula Loniak, DVM - Thu, Apr 09 2009 at 7:05 AM EST

Coming Back to Athens!

I've been living in northern California for the past 3 years & am preparing to move back to Athens. Your article has reminded me why I've decided that Athens is where I should be!

[reply](#)

Posted By Kathryn Lookofsky - Thu, Apr 09 2009 at 4:50 AM EST

Downtown Athens

Thanks for the great article, Lori! This is an exceptionally green and beautiful time of the year here. Y'all come visit! => www.DowntownAthensGa.com

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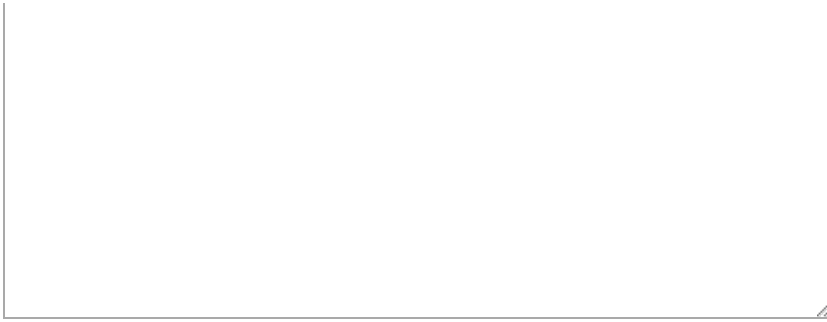
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